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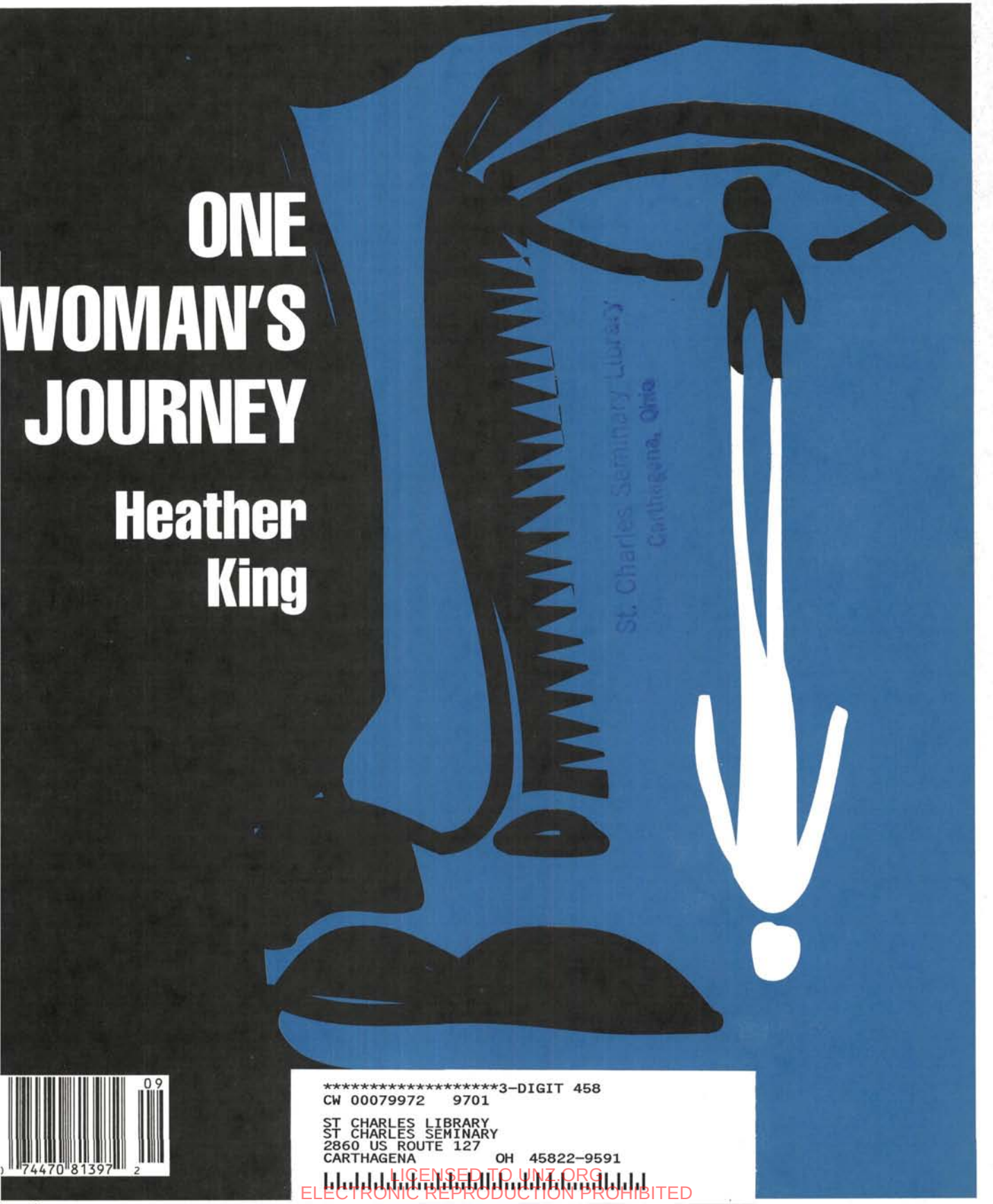

ONE WOMAN'S JOURNEY

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To the Editors

No to school vouchers

Wrong, wrong, wrong! I am amazed that you have been seduced by voucher propaganda [editorial, April 5]. After all the rhetoric has died down, ask yourselves, "Who will benefit from vouchers?" From experience we know that it will not be our poor brothers and sisters, but rather the elitist middle class. Realistically, vouchers are one way to create a two-tiered educational system whereby the well-to-do will not have to attend school with "those people." Vouchers are a government subsidy for white flight. In a recent California referendum, the voucher proposition was not endorsed by the state's bishops' conference; its members wisely saw through the veneer of respectability in a measure supported by ultraconservatives that promoted immigrant bashing and prejudice.

PATRICK J. MURPHY
Corona, Calif.

The editors reply:

Mr. Murphy identifies what is potentially the most worrisome aspect of any voucher system, but a concern that our editorial addressed in some detail. Specifically, we recommended that schools accepting vouchers be required to reserve a percentage of their enrollment for economically underprivileged children. As for creating a two-tiered educational system, the funding of public schools based on property taxes has already done that, and with increasingly dire consequences for poor communities. Vouchers are one plausible way both to ameliorate funding inequities and to encourage parental and community involvement in schools. Attributing mere prejudice to those who think vouchers might improve both public and private education is a canard.

All hail, McConnell!

Drums, cymbals, and trumpets! Praise and alleluia! for Frank McConnell's "Desecrating Literature" [April 5]. I hope it gets picked up by *Harper's, Utne, Reader's Digest*, and anthologies and textbooks yet unborn.

ELIZABETH MCMENAMIN
Scranton, Pa.

Literature will survive

I was pleased, amused, and annoyed by Frank McConnell's essay on the Modern Language Association's annual meeting and its journal, *PMLA*.

As another grunt in the academic trenches, I appreciated his skewering of the outrageous papers delivered at the MLA's annual meetings, papers that often reveal an almost pathological *hatred* of literature. Scanning them, one would hardly believe the works being discussed had any human beings represented in them. And the prose style! I am reminded of Peter De Vries's description of the German language as akin to the sound of several trunks rolling down a staircase.

But McConnell is wrong in his caricature of the antics of the academic "weenies" at the annual meeting. (His one visit in thirty years is not enough.) It's patently untrue that they don't go to sessions to hear papers delivered—attendance ranges from meager to standing-room-only for "hot" sessions. The real cause for despair is that many do attend. And not "everyone" gets drunk. Often the ambiance is much drearier—sipping white wine or *latté*, amid numbing conversations about departmental politics, publishers, and—God help us—diets and workouts!

McConnell also rightly skewers the association's journal for its frequent "desecration" of what makes literature engaging, valuable, and lovable. But there is hope in this wilderness! I suspect that few members actually read the journal. And there are important signs of a revolt from within the ranks—in the American Literature Association and in the newly formed international association of professors devoted to the humanistic (that is, traditional) approach to the study of literature.

JOHN F. DESMOND
Walla Walla, Wash.

Partners in academia

I appreciated Robert J. Egan's thoughtful and intelligent effort to answer the question "Can universities be Catholic?" [April 5]. But, like almost all the multiplying responses to this conundrum, the article elided an essential if awkward preliminary issue: What should be the relation of Catholic institutions to the larger scholarly world?

Should Catholic universities hire only Catholic faculty? Or accept non-Catholic faculty as a practical necessity, given a dearth of qualified Catholics (this would seem to be Egan's bent)? Or (as I would hope) welcome secular scholars as full partners in a mutually nourishing engagement between Catholic traditions and contemporary secular learning?

This issue of faculty hiring highlights the big neglected question in current conversations about "Catholic character." Can Catholic universities best foster a renewal of Catholic intellectual traditions in quasi-isolation from secular scholarship (the approach inherited from the neo-Thomist era), or in deliberate daily exchange with modern learning? What is our obligation to the academy at large? What is our duty to ourselves? How do these relate to each other?

JAMES TURNER
Notre Dame, Ind.

The author replies:

I am grateful for Professor Turner's kind words, and can assure him that I too welcome secular scholars, as well as Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu scholars, as full partners on Catholic campuses. All my article says is: "A

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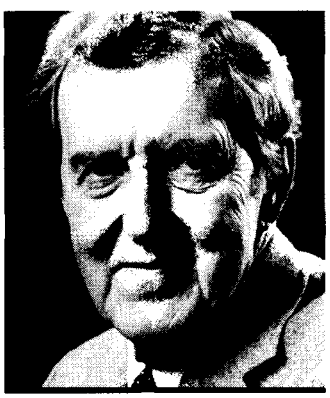

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(Continued from page 2)
Catholic university, it seems to me, will be a place where a significant number of its faculty and professional staff and of its student body are Catholics and people well-disposed toward Catholicism....Saying this leaves a lot of questions unanswered, I realize, and different universities will work out the details in different ways...." I don't understand why this should send a chill up anybody's spine.

Neither do I see how a renewal of Catholic intellectual traditions could possibly happen in quasi-isolation from secular scholarship. The Catholic intellectual tradition is a dialogue with Neoplatonism, Stoicism, Aristotelianism, Arabic philosophies, Renaissance humanism, natural sciences, German Idealism, American pragmatism, Marxism, Heideggerian and Wittgensteinian philosophies, psychoanalysis, social sciences, literary criticism, hermeneutic theory, and many other things. It almost always has been engaged in dialogue and almost everywhere is now.

So I welcome Professor Turner's worries, but my own concern is that many teachers—Catholic and otherwise—in many departments at many Catholic colleges and universities now teach their courses on the basis of a secular liberal worldview that has become an established religion in academia and which takes for granted the irrelevance of religion to thought and a serious intellectual life. Let's continue the conversation.

ROBERT J. EGAN, S.J.

Educational on education

As a returnee to the fold I want to compliment you on the generally high level of the articles I've read since I resubscribed about a year ago. I particularly want to thank you for the April 5 issue on Catholic education, a subject close to my heart. Thomas N. Maloney's report on his job search should be mailed *gratis* to the administrative vice-president of every Catholic college and university in the country. The academic job search is a well-worked genre, but Maloney really contributed something new, thanks to his honest appraisal of the hiring conditions which actually obtain at the large majority of Catholic colleges and universities, where indifference and even contempt for religious tradition are more commonly met than sectarian exclusivity.

MICHAEL J. HOLLERICH
Saint Paul, Minn.

Lay teachers as peons

Re: Robert J. Egan's "Can Universities be Catholic?" and Thomas N. Maloney's "Job Wanted: Catholic Colleges & the Hiring Dilemma" [April 5]:

Half a century ago, I earned the Ph.D. in chemistry from an Ivy League school and accepted a teaching post in a well-known Catholic university. Soon I found out that my lay Catholic colleagues and I were peons. In the eyes of the administrators, we were just hired hands, hired only because the order did not have enough priests to fill all the teaching slots. Our priest-administrators had more respect for janitors than for us, far more respect for students whose parents provided the school's income, and great respect for the few Jewish and Chinese faculty in our midst.

As for Catholicism, we were told that that was the priests' domain; we should stick to our area of secular expertise. Our administrators treated us exactly the way the entire pre-John XXIII church treated its laity, insisting that we were to "pray, pay, and obey"—and have many children in order to replenish the ranks of the priesthood and keep the convents full.

This attitude proved the one unpleasant aspect of a delightful experience of teaching students, initiating them into original research, and raising research funds for the university—the three secular tasks of a college professor.

Since this experience was not peculiarly mine but the common lot of large numbers of Catholic college teachers of my generation, please withhold my name and location.

PROFESSOR EMERITUS

"Why, this is an excellent résumé!"

Jesus and history

Shortly after reading Robert L. Wilken's thoughtful review [March 8] of Luke Timothy Johnson's *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels*, I happened upon a book on the life of Jesus written by the late Malcolm Muggeridge some thirty years ago. In it, Muggeridge expressed beautifully the ultimate futility of any search for the "historical" Jesus.

"Looking for Jesus in history," wrote Muggeridge, "is as futile as trying to invent a yardstick that will measure infinity, or a clock that will tick through eternity. God molds history to His purposes, revealing in it

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Commonweal, [ISSN 0010-3330] A Review of Public Affairs, Religion, Literature, and the Arts, is published biweekly except Christmas/New Year's; and monthly July and August, by Commonweal Foundation, 15 Dutch St., New York, NY, 10038. Telephone: (212) 732-0800. Display advertising correspondence should be sent to Ruth E. Taylor, 11 Graffam Rd., So. Portland, ME 04106 (207) 799-4387, classified advertising correspondence to 15 Dutch St. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Commonweal, 15 Dutch St. New York, NY 10038.

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Catholic Periodical Index, Index of American Periodical Verse, Book Review Digest, and Book Review Index. Microfilm from Vol. 1, 1924, to current issues available through University Microfilm, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 and on Microfiche from Bell & Howell, Wooster, OH 44691. *Commonweal* articles also are available at many libraries and research facilities on CD-ROM and in electronic data bases. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional offices. Copyright © 1996 Commonweal Foundation. Single Copy, $2.25. Yearly subscriptions, U.S., $44; Canada, $47; foreign, $50. Special two-year rate: U.S. $75; Canada, $81; foreign, $87. Annual rates for air-mail delivery outside U.S.: Western Hemisphere, $84; Europe, $89; other parts of the world, $99. All Canadian and foreign subscriptions must be paid in U.S. dollars by International Money Order or by check on a U.S. bank.

Illustrations: Cover, Antonucci; p. 3, photo courtesy Chadbourne & Parke LLP; pp. 3, 12, Rita Corbin; pp. 3, 18, Ross, Rothco; pp. 4, 28, Baloo, Rothco; pp. 8, 22, Gerard, Rothco; p. 10, Valerry; p. 16, Husband, Rothco; p. 20 Schwadron, Rothco; p. 24, Donegan, Rothco; p. 31, Matt, Rothco.

Weeping women

As expected, President Bill Clinton vetoed the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act (*see*, "Clinton's Choice," *Commonweal*, April 19). He did so surrounded by women who had undergone the procedure—all of them, it was said, for serious medical reasons. One woman tearfully described having her abortion (of a fetus with a chromosomal disorder) on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. The *New York Times* reported that the woman "struggled to control her emotions as Mr. Clinton put his hand on her shoulder" (April 11, 1996).

Clinton could not contain his well-honed compassion: "We need more parents in America like these folks....And just because they happen to be in a tiny minority to bear a unique burden that God imposes on just a few people every year, we can't forget our obligation to protect their lives, their children, and the families' future."

To whom was this defense of the veto a greater affront, God or women?

Clinton has become an adept at comforting the sorrowing and the afflicted. He vetoed the bill late on Wednesday, April 10, just after the funeral of Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown, who had received genuinely heart-stirring tributes from thousands of friends, co-workers, and Washington, D.C. residents. Perhaps Mr. Clinton was in his stirring-tribute mode and couldn't stop.

It is possible to imagine women so utterly devastated that they would resort to an abortion procedure that involves half-delivering a fetus of twenty or more weeks' gestation, suctioning out its brain, and delivering a dead baby—that is, would resort to a procedure that verges on infanticide. It is also, frankly, possible to imagine women so utterly distraught that they suffocate their newborns at birth. It happens every day. But as hard pressed as such women may feel, it does not follow that the law should sanction either infanticide or third-trimester abortions. Nor should the president of the United States bless such things. In fact, the lugubrious performance of the president, moving from the funeral of Secretary Brown to a ceremonial veto of the partial-birth abortion ban, surrounded by weeping women, was inappropriate and manipulative.

The headline of a *Times* news analysis on April 12, "A Calculation in Tears," captured the whiff of campaign politics implicit in Clinton's veto. Among women voters, he is twenty points ahead of Republican candidate Robert Dole. So not only was this veto meant to signal his sympathy toward women, it was also calculated to reenforce his lead in the gender gap. The Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act had strong support among both Democrats and Republicans in Congress and the president would have been at no partisan disadvantage in approving the ban. Quite the contrary—for where else would pro-abortion voters go?

Abortion-rights groups pressed the president to veto the ban and flew the weeping women to Washington to witness it. In praising the president, Kate Michelman of the National Abortion Rights Action League took the high ground: "The president has chosen compassion and concern for families facing medical tragedies over the cynical, election-year ploy of the politicians advancing this legislation." But it was Mr. Clinton who went about as far as you can go and invited the women

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to tell their partial-birth abortion stories publicly as he vetoed the ban.

The fact of the matter is, late abortions should be countenanced only to save the life of the mother. Maternal health or "future fertility"—the reasons given by Clinton for vetoing the bill—are notoriously slippery justifications that in practice amount to little more than abortion-on-demand. Women—and men—have many reasons to weep about the current practice of abortion in the United States, and the continued resort to partial-birth abortion procedures is one of them.

CATHOLICISM

The best thing about the recent episcopal criticism of *Catholicism* is that its author, the Reverend Richard P. McBrien, is so able to speak for himself. Who doubts that he will give as good as he gets from the Doctrine Committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. What he has gotten so far, along with free publicity for the latest edition of his widely used overview of Catholic teaching, is a sixteen-page unsigned critique of his book, scolding it for (1) "inaccurate or at least misleading" statements regarding matters like the basis of Jesus' sinlessness and Mary's perpetual virginity; (2) "an overemphasis on the plurality of opinion within the Catholic theological tradition"; and (3) overstatement of the importance of recent theology to the detriment of the past and of authoritative teaching.

We strongly suspect that not even as robust a personality as McBrien would maintain that his 1,300-page book was without fault, without passages that could be construed as "misleading" or an "overemphasis" or "confusing." The same could be said of many other books, even some written by bishops, that have somehow escaped the Doctrine Committee's censure.

But the matter is not mysterious. McBrien is a candid, outspoken critic of many current church policies, ergo his book is scrutinized as others are not. He did not help by suggesting in an ambiguous Preface that he and the bishops—who had gone several rounds on earlier editions—were now of one mind. No doubt, Rome threatened, American conservatives complained, and Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk—the committee head and a man who does not believe in delaying the inevitable—decided to clear the McBrien file off his desk with as little damage as possible.

Such is life in contemporary American Catholicism. In the last two years, McBrien has produced, besides *Catholicism* (HarperCollins), a remarkably useful (and handsome) one-volume *Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (HarperCollins). He has even written the text for *Inside Catholicism* (yes, HarperCollins), a thoroughly traditional photo book of Catholic rituals and symbols. It seems to us that, despite the inevitable shortcomings and debatable points in these works, McBrien has done more to convey effectively to masses of people the breadth and depth of the Catholic "thing" than most of the bishops combined. No good deed goes unpunished.

OF SEVERAL MINDS

ABIGAIL McCARTHY

EDMUND S. MUSKIE

Let us now praise honorable men

When former Secretary of State Edmund S. Muskie died recently, a neighbor couple came to call on his wife Jane. "We always liked and admired your husband," they told her, "but we didn't really know that he was a great man." In a way it was as if, like those neighbors, the whole country came belatedly to that realization and to the realization of what we owed him. But it was not only a belated but a limited realization.

Columnist David Broder, perhaps, as he has been called, the pre-eminent American political journalist, wrote that Muskie was an apostle of civility and a politician of rare vision. "The obituaries of Muskie were appreciative but barely did justice to the clarity with which he addressed two overriding national issues decades before most other politicians came to grips with them." One was the necessity of equalizing the relationship between the federal government and the states as governmental responsibilities grew and widened. The other was the need to put order into congressional spending, and in response to that need, he led the way to the establishment of the budget process.

Few people can and do appreciate these fine but important points of governance and their effect on the country, but we can all give thanks for Muskie's greatest gift to us—clean air, clean water—a livable world. Commentator Mark Shields said it best:

> Before he began his work, there were no national laws and no international agreements governing the quality of the country's air and water. None. When he began his work, nearly three-quarters of the nation's rivers were unswimmable and unfishable. The Great Lakes were dying. In too many places, the air was a threat to a child's lungs and even to a community's life.
>
> In no small measure because of the laws he wrote, twenty years later three-quarters of the nation's rivers were both swimmable and fishable. The Great Lakes were alive—recreationally, economi-

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cally, and spiritually. More than 95 percent of the lead had been removed from the nation's air.

To do that Muskie had to change the way people thought. He had to stem the unbridled despoliation of field and river and lake and terrain that for two hundred years Americans had accepted as necessary for progress. He had to bring about a revolution in the way people lived and acted, convert them from selfish heedlessness to healthy, sane, and safe practices that benefit the whole community. And he did just that quietly and effectively. How?

The way lay in his character. A striking example of one of his basic beliefs is recounted in a letter to the editor of the *Washington Post* after his death. Former ambassador Julius Walker told of a staff meeting at which Muskie presided when secretary of state. One of the subjects was how the United States should vote on a forthcoming resolution at the UN. All the attending assistant secretaries advised against voting for it. It might split the NATO countries, cause problems with other states, etc. Secretary Muskie ended the discussion by saying that nevertheless the United States would vote for the resolution. "Because it is right," he said. Principle outweighed politics.

As secretary of state he could enforce what was right by *fiat*. It was one of his very human characteristics that, as he often frankly said, he preferred being governor of Maine and secretary of state—offices in which he exercised final authority—to being in the Senate where legislation was a matter of consensus. Yet he was the quintessential legislator; almost reflexively, the eulogists at his funeral called him Senator. He was the master of achieving consensus, of persuading colleagues of both parties to unite in support of ground-breaking and politically threatening initiatives. He could do that because he was fair, open to other senators' problems, deliberative, and convincing. But in the end he could do it because what he was advocating was right and others recognized the basic integrity on which his cause was based.

In his tribute at the final service, President Jimmy Carter said that no man was more presidential or more worthy of being president than Ed Muskie. That he never became president is attributed now to the shabby press handling of an incident during the 1972 primary campaign, an incident unfortunately exhumed by far too many news shows at the time of his death. He was a victim of several of the Nixon-planted "dirty tricks" during that campaign. He was finally driven to an emotional public attempt at refutation in New Hampshire when the infamous *Manchester Union Leader* was fed and published a scurrilous attack on his wife. A man of deep feeling, he is said to have wept. At the time his emotion and frustration were depicted as signs of instability and weakness. His campaign languished and eventually died.

Reflecting on this at the time of Muskie's death, David Broder wrote that he still has a guilty conscience about "unwittingly helping the Nixon saboteurs do their work by publicizing Muskie's response to their libel." Others noted the sea change in public opinion that now welcomes and approves a display of feeling by a president. There was ironic and touching evidence of this in the speech Stephen Muskie, the eldest son, gave to gathered friends. He spoke emotionally, with unabashed love and sentiment, of a father dear to his wife and five children, of a grandfather who delighted his grandchildren with mischievous play, and was met with emotion in return.

Great men are essentially human. Muskie could rage at injustice but exhibited great reasonableness and a spirit of reconciliation in working for justice. Like George Washington, he contended with a towering temper as he strove for moral rectitude. Like Lincoln, to whom he was often compared, he had a fondness for humorous and sometimes earthy stories and disarming candor.

Ed Muskie was a man of faith. Every Sunday at home saw him at his parish Mass and, a world traveler, he sought out a church wherever he was. His fierce patriotism was rooted in his pride in a country in which he, the son of a Polish immigrant, could achieve a professional education and high office. He loved his books, especially histories; he also loved golf and spectator sports. He believed in his fellow man and practiced the politics of trust. He walked by his own words spoken in 1970. "The world is a baffling and hazardous place, but it can be shaped by the will of men." We shall miss him. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

JOHN GARVEY

RADIO VS. THE INTERNET

Only the Shadow knows

Are you on the Internet? I was asked this twice in one day, first by a bishop and then by a priest. It made me wonder about the ways we choose to distract ourselves.

I love radio. I can't quite say I hate television, because that implies a lot more passion than I have about the subject, but I think it is a real drain on our culture, and even at its best it doesn't have the engaging quality of radio. One of the very few nonchurch, noncharity donations I make is to WNYC, New York's excellent public radio station, and it is a selfish one: I would hate to lose it.

But I am a child of my generation, which is aging fast. Radio was there from the start for me, and television wasn't, thank God. I loved sitting in a dark living room under a long table listening to "The Shadow," looking through the back of a large radio set at glowing tubes that always seemed to me like a

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science-fiction city of the future, letting Lamont Cranston's suave way of dealing with criminals give me one of my first warped pictures of adulthood. I also listened to "Suspense"; "The FBI in Peace and War"; "Tom Corbett, Space Cadet"; "Johnny Dollar"—he was an insurance-claims investigator, can you imagine?—"Let's Pretend"; and "Sergeant Preston of the Yukon." My grandfather gave us a television set shortly after the time when all-music formats drove the serials off AM radio; maybe he sensed that something had gone out of the world and a replacement was needed. But as much as I liked "Captain Video," he was no "Shadow."

Now my relationship to radio is different. Most of what I listen to is public radio, since other radio is usually as bad as television. I listen to good music, well-conducted interviews, intelligent exchanges, and better news reporting than I can find anywhere else. Sometimes I am moved to buy a book as a result of this. I do worry, though, that all this process, valuable as it is, is (music excepted) largely about *information*.

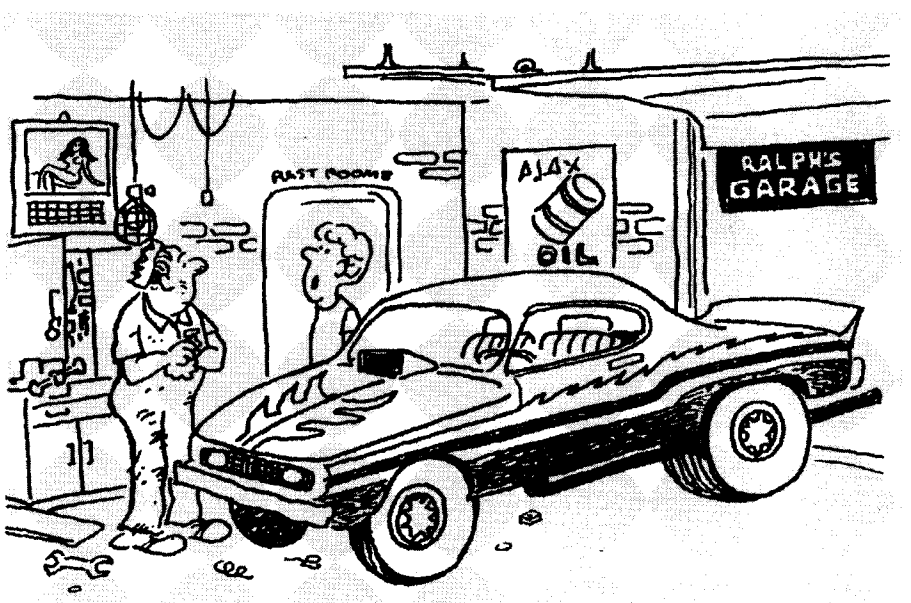
This might not seem like a problem, but it is. Radio was first a way into wonder—the wonder, maybe, of pulp fiction or cheap thrills, but it did have to do with wonder, which matters deeply, and not only to kids. When William Carlos Williams says about poetry that "men die miserably, every day, for lack of what is found there," he speaks about something that begins, sometimes anyway, with "The Shadow." And it happens only when there is a kind of rapt attention, something you give to a poem or story. Maybe this is why Garrison Keillor at his best works so well: you pay attention, and your attention is answered wonderfully.

This is something like the attention you bring to reading, though there is a nice lazy difference to a story or a good interview—you can move around the kitchen, make tea or a sandwich, or salad, listening to it. Try that with a book and you get mustard all over your shirt.

After I was asked about the Internet I began to wonder about my aversion to it. I am not hooked into it, on purpose—not out of any strong sense that there is anything inherently wicked about the Internet, but rather because of a kind of self-preservation. I know how easily, even how happily, I am distracted from things I should be paying attention to, and this seems like one more kind of noise, one further distraction, added to the possibility of renting a movie or watching television, and, unlike radio, I can't really have it on in the background. I have to pay attention to it, even interact with it. The worst of both worlds: a tar-baby combination of television's passive captivity with the attention and involvement reading and writing demand, with neither the seriousness of good, solid reading nor the permanence of any writing that matters. I can see the attraction—that is my problem precisely—of why someone would spend hours at this. And it would all be in pursuit of information, not wonder. Wonder requires a kind of quiet and distance, the kind you can't have at a keyboard.

Maybe we will get to the point when being online will allow for long silences, blank pages, the equivalent of the fountain pen started and then stopped, or the listening that poetry demands. But something in the nature of the thing runs the other way. We pay for the seconds, the minutes, the hours spent there. It's something like someone stomping his foot impatiently, waiting for the next move. It isn't even as calm as chess, which isn't really calm. It's a "what's next?" medium. A friend who recently found himself addicted said, "I hope I get tired of this soon and lose interest." He knows there is something strange about it.

I am not opposed to the technology of the Internet—e-mail makes sense in a lot of ways, and there is something interesting about having all that information available. But the eagerness with which people have jumped at it makes me think it is one more kind of noise, or like inhaling all the time and never exhaling. I don't agree with those who think that this is something like citizen's band radio, a passing fad; this is much deeper and more important. It offers an illusion of intimacy without the risks of real intimacy, a version of connectedness that doesn't really connect, and this is appealing to a lot of us. It isn't the technology that is wrong; reading a trashy novel can be just as distracting. What's wrong is us, with our need for distraction and our unwillingness to encounter silence or stillness. Our fear of silence may be a fear that silence will show us to be empty, will judge us without having to say a word; and this says more about us than any of the ways we choose to distract ourselves. □



"It doesn't make enough noise!"

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Gary Prevost

NICARAGUA SURPRISE

Sandinistas split, Somoza party gains

In early February, Pope John Paul visited Nicaragua for the second time, bringing renewed international attention to a nation that has slipped from the limelight. In February 1990, world attention had been riveted on the election that brought Violeta Chamorro to power in an upset of the ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). Six years later, this October, there will be another presidential election. It has received little international attention. For Nicaragua, however, it may be as critical as the 1990 election.

In an attempt to carry forward the work of the current government, Chamorro's son-in-law, Antonio Lacayo, is running as the candidate of the newly formed National Project (PN). But the government is unpopular and his candidacy is registering less than 5 percent support in the polls. The Sandinista Front remains the leading opposition party, but it has been damaged by a split. The chief beneficiary of the troubles of both Chamorro and the FSLN has been Arnoldo Alemán, the mayor of Managua until he resigned last year to begin a campaign for the presidency. Most current polls show Alemán, head of the Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC), as the clear front-runner with support of between 40 and 45 percent. His popularity is surprising since the PLC is the legacy of the dictator Anastasio Somoza, who was overthrown by the Sandinista revolution in 1979.

To understand how an heir to Somoza's brutal past stands on the verge of gaining power in Nicaragua, it is necessary to analyze the last six years. When Chamorro took office in April 1990, she promised to reverse the downward trend of the economy within one hundred days. In fact, her government almost ended then. The popular forces, responding to a call from Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega "to govern from below," took to the streets to block her program of rolling back the social and economic gains of the Sandinista period. By summer 1990, Nicaragua had gone back to a near civil-war situation with barricades in the streets of Managua. At that point FSLN leaders struck a deal with the government. It protected the FSLN from the liquidation plans of the far Right and granted legitimacy to key aspects of the Sandinista land-reform program. In return, the FSLN pulled back from its street mobilizations and acquiesced in the return of control of the Nicaraguan economy to the financial elite through privatization. Over the next three years, the FSLN engaged in virtual co-government with Chamorro's governing UNO party through an alliance in the National Assembly.

Chamorro's policies benefited the small Nicaraguan upper-middle class but failed to solve the country's primary social and economic problems. The working-poor and marginalized sectors of Nicaraguan society, the power base of the FSLN, were further impoverished. Because the FSLN was seen by many as cooperating with the government rather than acting as a forthright opposition, its fortunes sank along with those of the Chamorro government. The FSLN was also hurt by the widely held perception that its top political leaders and some officials of the Sandinista army had profited illegally during the transition period, taking possession of cars, homes, and valuable farm land, in what was known as the *piñata*. Tied in the popular mind to several prominent cases of corruption, the Sandinista Front began to lose the moral authority it had accrued during its years as a rebel force and the holder of state power.

The FSLN's problems were further compounded when the party underwent a formal split in 1995. A new group, the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS) was formed under the leadership of former FSLN Directorate member and vice-president, Sergio Ramírez, who declared his intention to run for the presidency in 1996. The new party has only about one-tenth the membership of the FSLN, but its ranks include many prominent Sandinista intellectuals, among them former Minister of Culture Ernesto Cardenal and former National Directorate member Luis Carrión. The FSLN split may have been inevitable, given the ideological diversity of the movement; but the fissure has divided the party and the progressive forces at a dangerous time of resurgence by the right wing.

The rise of Alemán and the PLC is a complex phenomenon. While an heir to the Somoza legacy, Alemán probably does not represent a serious possibility of the return of terror and dictatorship to Nicaragua. The PLC leader's current advantage in the polls is the result of his work as the popular mayor of Managua and the population's overall disappointment with both Chamorro and the FSLN. As mayor, Alemán skillfully used large-scale public-works projects and patronage to cultivate the image of a politician "who gets things done." This image has played well in many of the neighborhoods of the capital. Initially, Mayor Alemán's rhetoric and actions against the FSLN raised the specter of a return to Somoza tyranny. He carried out provocative attacks on the FSLN, including an attempt to close down the monument to Carlos Fonseca, FSLN founder, in central Managua. But Alemán moderated his stance, conceding the reality of a core of Sandinista support in Nicaraguan society and the commitment of the overwhelming majority of Nicaraguans to political democracy. Alemán realizes that he must win the presidency through the ballot, and once in power he is likely to have little option except to rule by constitutional means. The Nicaraguan populace remains committed to democratic rule and any would-be dictator faces a popular uprising.

With a significant portion of the Nicaraguan electorate undecided, the election outcome is not preordained. The progressive forces led by the FSLN may yet find a way to unite and to craft a political message that successfully re-

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futes the neoliberal populism of the PLC leader. Such a strategy is possible because of Alemán's identification with Somoza and the reality that his political and economic program would do little more to improve the lives of ordinary Nicaraguans than have the six years of the Chamorro government. □

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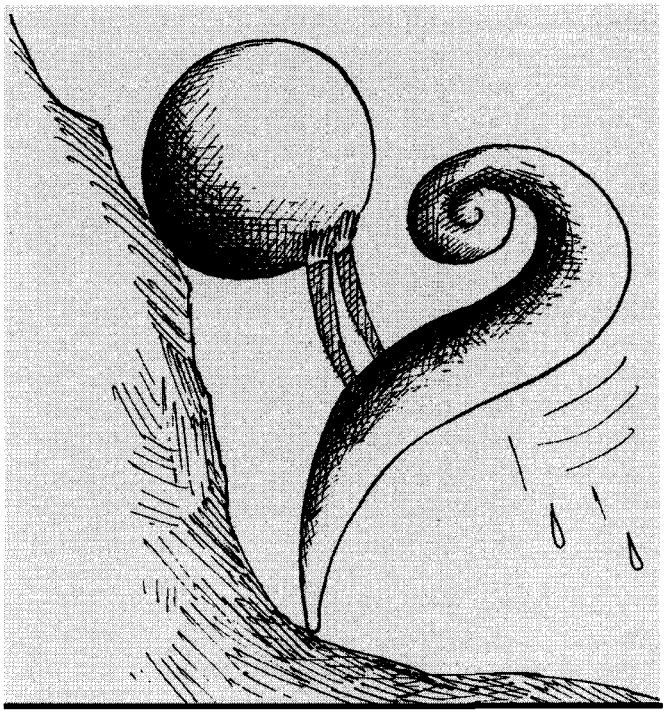
Patrick Jordan

THE STATE OF HAITI

Still at ground zero

A trip to Haiti is unlike a thousand elsewhere. The small Caribbean country, the size of Massachusetts, is not only the poorest in the Western Hemisphere, but people who have traveled in Africa and India told me they have seen nothing worse. Seventy-five percent of its 7 million people live in abject poverty (starting each day from ground zero and struggling just to begin tomorrow at the same level). Twenty percent are middle-class (that is, able to provide for themselves), 5 percent are wealthy, and 1 percent are super wealthy: they control 40 percent of the nation's wealth. The contrasts are crushing: men resembling pack animals push carts laden with charcoal through the cratered streets, only to be passed by a cherry-red Lexus riding as if on air.



Following a decade of acute political unrest and economic uncertainty, including the devastating three-year trade embargo imposed to force the reinstatement of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti seems poorer than ever. But with the return of Aristide and the first peaceful transfer of a democratically elected administration this past February, there is at least the prospect of some slight change.

You catch the state of things on arrival. At the Port-au-Prince Airport, the baggage area is teeming with returning Haitians. But the baggage carousel is a skeleton of its former self, with whole sections of its rubber plating missing. While standing there, I watch the belt gobble up several suitcases, ripping them open and sending their contents onto the waiting-room floor. The owner of one shrugs. She is surrounded by men jockeying to carry what's left of the bag. With 70 percent unemployment in the country, waves of people can be found at any hour looking for hire.

First impressions of Haiti can be devastating. A mountainous country, Haiti has suffered heavy (and almost complete) deforestation this century, followed by unrelieved erosion. (The name of Aristide's political party, "Lavalas," means "cleansing torrent," so prominent are floods in people's experience.) With no public system for trash collection and sewage disposal, garbage lies piled everywhere and is displaced only by the runoff from the rains. In Port-au-Prince's massive slums—one of them, Cité Soleil, the world's largest, is home to 250,000 in a twenty-seven-square-mile area—human refuse floats in open channels through the streets. Built in swamp areas that lie below sea level, these encampments are inundated by sewage whenever it rains. Disease is widespread.

Haiti is not without those who wish it well. I am told there are 160 different aid agencies working in Cité Soleil alone. An experienced British aid worker has commented that he has never seen such a concentration of groups. But a priest with over thirty years of experience in Haiti tells me it might be better if all these groups left the country alone for a few years. (Haiti's own rice production, for example, is undermined by cheap rice imported from abroad, some of it by aid groups.) Still, the priest notes immediately, assistance cannot be cut off because it is essential for survival. His own rule of thumb: every dollar for assistance ought to be matched by a dollar for development.

A Catholic missionary tells me that "Haiti is 80 percent Catholic, 20 percent Protestant, and 100 percent Voodoo." In 1966 the Roman church translated its liturgy into Creole, a watershed event that brought its leadership and institutions into closer contact with the poor. For a period, the official church was even in the vanguard of resistance to the Jean-Claude Duvalier regime, but later reverted to its habit of supporting whatever government wielded power. This proved particularly damaging after the 1991 ouster of Aristide. Recently, the hierarchy has mended some fences, but regaining confidence among the rank-and-file will be hard, slow work.

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Aristide, "the father of modern Haiti," is not a politician in the usual sense. He speaks with a passion for the masses that is unconcerned for nuance, is seen as the people's advocate, and appears mystically bound to them. He entered politics, he says, to transform "the promise of dignity [for the Haitian people] into living dignity on the daily level" (*Dignity*, University Press of Virginia). And they have reciprocated with a volatile loyalty. But Aristide's abbreviated presidency did not demonstrate much organizational ability. He exhorted government bureaucrats to "marry politics and morality," but did not follow up with effective reform. Though he is now out of office, recently married, and in temporary retreat on an estate outside Port-au-Prince, most assume he will run again for the presidency in five years. To do so he will have to keep his hand in the Lavalas party and maintain his bond with the masses.

The newly installed president, fifty-three-year-old René Préval, is an Aristide supporter and his former prime minister. An agronomist by training, Préval may be better suited to run a government than his predecessor. "I know I must translate democracy into improvements in everyday life," he said at the time of his inauguration. He has his work cut out for him.

Last year the United States provided Haiti $235 million in assistance. This year the Clinton administration has asked for only $115 million, and Congress is inclined to appropriate even less. (One U.S. aid worker tells me that historically every dollar of U.S. government assistance to Haiti has returned seventy cents to the U.S. Today, the bulk of such assistance goes to strengthening *foreign* investment projects in Haiti.)

Despite the return of democracy and the end of the trade embargo, daily life has not yet improved for most Haitians. Aristide abolished the coup-loving army and replaced it with a new 7,000-man police force. But it is poorly trained and inadequately equipped, and violence is on the rise. Some police officers simply refuse to patrol neighborhoods where they are outgunned by local gangs and drug dealers. There is also the unnerving threat that when the UN pulls out its remaining 1,800 troops in six months, political violence associated with the Duvalierists could return. As for economic development, it has barely gotten back into first gear from being in reverse.

So Haiti remains a mystery, languishing but offering promise, "a hall of mirrors" politically and culturally, as John Hogan once described it (*Commonweal*, September 22, 1989). As our group was about to depart, we noticed a luxuriant trumpet vine entwined in the razor wire of the cyclone fence surrounding a UN military encampment. Perhaps that image captures something of Haiti today: a complex land of violence and exclusion, beauty and ugliness, despair and aspiration, trying to surmount its past in the face of a resistant future. □

Patrick Jordan *is managing editor of* Commonweal. *He recently visited Haiti on a three-day trip funded and organized by Food for the Poor.*

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ONE WOMAN'S JOURNEY

Following my own unguided will

Heather King

Some mornings I wake stupefied with wonder that I have come of my own free will to the neighborhood in which I live. A complicated confluence of events has brought me to this my forty-third year, this mahogany bed, this husband beside me, this cat's breath in my ear: Koreatown, Los Angeles, California. It is a neighborhood under physical, mental, and spiritual siege. Here, encircled and infiltrated, we live in the agora. As I write, a man ten feet from my desk puffs a cigarette on his porch; I can see the whites of his eyes. Even sex in your own bedroom has the aura of public spectacle.

Here it is not an exaggeration to say that somebody will steal it if it's not nailed down. Somebody, for instance, stole my brand-new bicycle, then somebody stole my car. When I secured the steering wheel of the new one with a "Club," somebody smashed the side window and stole my battery, spare tire, and jack. The hood is now secured with a length of stout chain and a Master's padlock. My husband's pickup has been relieved of both headlights, a radio, the antenna, several Freddy Fender tapes, and a full set of mechanic's tools.

The majority of our neighbors are Latino and Korean and the place is lousy with children. Mothers and fathers—mostly mothers—throng the sidewalk with their litters of offspring. I used to wonder with irritation why these people give birth so relentlessly. The hands of every woman seemed to have a permanent grip on the handle of a baby stroller: more hungry mouths, more consumers, more litterers, more criminals. Had news of the population explosion somehow failed to reach them?

I like to think of myself as a solitary sort, yet I am drawn by the carnival of life that surrounds me. This disintegrating neighborhood seems to be a sterling example of the effect of global overcrowding; collective wisdom has it that the solution to the problem is more guns, more locks, more money, and fewer people. But living in Koreatown for three years has taught me that far from making me safe, those things are a symbol of a mortal danger; the danger of becoming unable to hear the deepest cries of our soul. An odd thing has occurred in the midst of this seething, surging mass of humanity: in spite of having undergone three, I have developed the conviction that abortion is wrong.

My husband and I moved to this part of town from the more fashionable, homogeneous, and Caucasian Westside for one basic reason: it was cheaper. Our decision grew partly out of the dawning realization that the only way to save money was to live below our means and partly from a growing unease with the relentlessly upscale, supposedly ultrahip "lifestyle" the Westside seemed to encourage and support. One of the advantages of Koreatown is that the buildings tend to be older and possess some charm; our 1940s French Normandy courtyard apartment has hardwood floors, crown moldings, and a bathroom lined with hand-painted tiles. We eat beneath a chandelier in the formal dining room. I hang my clothes out to dry on a line ringed by geraniums, gardenia, and hydrangea.

Three times a day the produce truck parks out front, blaring "Turkey in the Straw" or "O'er the Bounding Main" for twenty minutes at a stretch. At 8 P.M., a man who sells bread out of the back of his car pulls up and emits a haunting wail, like a mullah calling the devout to prayer. Women balancing towel-covered recycled spackling compound buckets on their heads ply the street chanting, "Ta-MA-les, ta-MA-les...." We fall asleep to the whirr of circling helicopters and the staccato lullaby of gunfire. Crack addicts propel their shopping carts through the alley; car alarms shriek like wounded animals; the spray cans of the graffiti "taggers" hiss audibly. Girlish screams follow the thud of fist against flesh.

The litter is ferocious. A set of unspoken rules prevails: when holding something you no longer have any use for—a newspaper, a napkin, a styrofoam cup—open your hand and let the thing drop to the ground where you stand. When finished eating, throw what's left—a chicken bone, a corn cob, a banana peel—in the street. If there's something you don't want indoors—a sofa, a mattress, a refrigerator—open the door and put it on the sidewalk. If you've come to pick someone up, lay on the horn as you turn onto the street and sit in front of the building, blasting away, until your passenger strolls out. If you're drunk and have to urinate, lean up against a busy storefront, zip down your fly, and let 'er rip.

When I do the dishes, I can see the Korean mother across the way stirring a pot and wiping her table. A kind of blue-net birdcage, housing what appear to be dead sardines, dangles from an eave; kimchee ferments below in an earthenware crock. My husband jokes that they won't eat anything unless it's rotten. On the porch, shoes are aligned in a neat row—plastic flip-flops, blocky sandals of butterscotch leatherette, cracked black pumps from

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Payless. Babies with duckling hair teeter across the porch. A girl clomps up and down on pink roller skates; the husbands pace and smoke.

The Latino kids live in the buildings south of ours. They patrol on bikes, brandish guns fashioned from scrap wood, and throw their ice cream wrappers in the street. Juan and Fidel help me carry groceries. Tito sells chocolate bars to raise money for his school band. When our cat disappeared, Carlos presented us with a scrawny black kitten he found rooting in the garbage. I walk by their apartments at night and see whole families sprawled on the floor, bathed in the blue light of TV screens.

I come from a white working-class family in which I was the first ever to complete college. Coming of age in the '60s, I believed passionately in sexual freedom and the concomitant right to choose abortion. Also a staunch supporter of drinking and drugs, I became deeply alcoholic and sobered up in my mid-thirties to discover that I had somehow graduated from law school. I have now been married for six years, and, at forty-three, am childless. It is difficult to admit that two of the babies I aborted were conceived with married men, one of whom was a one-night stand, and that the third abortion was performed during the course of a long-term relationship. I would like to be able to say that I agonized over the decisions, but the fact is that they were based on expedience and fear. Motherhood would have disrupted my life in every conceivable way. It would call upon resources I was not at all certain I possessed—patience, selflessness, the ability to go without sleep—and I viewed it, frankly, as a kind of prison sentence. It seemed inconceivable that a woman would actually invite the upheaval that a baby entails. I don't care *how* much joy they say it brings, I said to myself, no way am I getting sucked into that trap.

When we arrived in Koreatown, I was working as a litigation attorney in a Beverly Hills office. I could scarcely have been more temperamentally ill-suited for the job, but it was the first time in my life I had made decent money and I was desperately afraid to give it up. My eyes, red-rimmed with fatigue, fell upon the bimonthly paycheck with the same grim relish a buzzard displays for carrion; I dragged through each day consumed by anxiety and the hideous fear that I would contract some stress-based disease and keel over dead at my desk. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but there was something fundamentally artificial and dishonest and life-diminishing about the lawyering I was doing. Part of it was the fact that the basic object of litigation is to manipulate the truth, rather than bring it to light; but it also had something to do with the stomach-turning arrogance that prevailed among my colleagues, a presumption of entitlement and innate merit that was doubly repulsive because of the lack of even a rudimentary moral compass.

During those four years my life felt, oddly enough, like a prison sentence—the sentence I had hoped to avoid by exercising intelligence backed by the unfettered exercise of free will. As a matter of fact, although I had enjoyed virtually every purported freedom that modern life has to offer, I realized that in one way, my life had *always* felt like a sentence. I had drunk and smoked and slept around to my heart's content, yet the apotheosis of my personal freedom had consisted of servitude to a bottle of booze and getting pregnant by someone whose name I barely knew. My expensive legal education had bought me a different kind of bondage: in the name of what was supposed to be truth, I took advantage, at least vicariously through my employer, of the opportunity to lie, cheat, steal, bully, lord it over the rest of the peons, and rake in the cash.

This awareness crept over me slowly, in the context of, and strongly abetted by, a religious conversion. It was a long, arduous process, which, though I didn't know it at the time, began the day I stopped drinking. The devil is very much a going concern in the life of an active alcoholic; he is cast out by slow degrees. But the small sense of wonder that accompanied the first blush of freedom from physical dependence was the mustard seed from which everything grew.

One of the people who helped me was Flannery O'Connor. O'Connor lived a monkish life that looked like a kind of penance, but her outlook was breathtakingly devoid of self-pity; in fact, she was dryly, hilariously funny. She wrote—a goal to which I had always aspired and had never done a single thing to advance—with a fierce and uncompromising passion that encompassed and reflected her entire existence. O'Connor saw her writerly vocation as pure grace, once remarking of a trip to Lourdes, made for the ostensible purpose of restoring the use of her legs, that she would rather be able to write than walk.

I had followed my own unguided will, and it had led me straight to hell on earth: an existence characterized by guilt, shame, doubt, insecurity, and the inability to love or be loved. I lived the kind of violence that appears so inexplicable yet real in O'Connor's stories. And seemingly against every rational instinct, the violence prepared the way for that free-

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dom from the bondage of self that can only be achieved in seeking Christ's will, not our own.

While I could never quite decide whether life in Koreatown was a blessing or a curse, I increasingly began to see that it was the same combination of the grotesque and sublime for which Christ had died and that O'Connor captured in the beauty of her strange and startling stories. Tentatively, I began to attend Mass and study Scripture. I read Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, Romano Guardini, Saint Augustine, each of whom helped, in his own way, to introduce me to a new way of looking at and being in the world. The church's opposition to abortion, however, seemed an insurmountable stumbling block. I still could not see how any intelligent, progressive woman could seriously subscribe to the notion of depriving herself of the right to make choices about her own body.

I still could not see how any intelligent, progressive woman could seriously subscribe to the notion of depriving herself of the right to make choices about her own body.

But the more I thought about it seriously the more I found that much of the public debate centers on semantics: around "viability," trimesters, whether a finned creature with a shadowy spine is or is not yet "human," the legal definition of murder. These are questions that can go whichever way the wind blows and will never be fully resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Still, sooner or later everyone is forced to agree that scraping off or sucking out whatever you choose to call the living creature in a mother's womb is an act of violence—defined by *Webster's* as "acting with or characterized by great physical force, so as to injure or damage." Abortion is an exercise of power by the strong over the wholly weak. The women's movement has been on the bandwagon for years about the issue of power and exploitation—as it pertains to *men*. Yet jeremiads against violence, I came to think, eventually ring hollow when we resort to violence ourselves.

Nitpicking about whether a fetus somehow "equals" a human being misses the point; what matters is that abortion is the willful destruction of a potential human life, and that's wrong. Abortion profanes the most mysterious act of creation we can know on this earth. It's emblematic of the distorted orientation of our hearts and minds: the faithless heart that makes women want to emulate the "freedom" of the men who have abused or abandoned them.

Women are wrong if we think that the right to abortion gives us the same kind of "autonomy" men supposedly enjoy. It won't because it can't: in the worst-case scenario, the guy walks away, but we destroy the human life that's growing inside us. We must first recognize that the freedom to deny responsibility for one's actions—whether the actor is a man or a woman—is really no freedom at all. The freedom to choose cannot mean the freedom to choose evil. Above all, the violence implicit in the act of abortion is directed not only against our children but against ourselves; women are implicated physically, mentally, and spiritually in the act of human creation—or its destruction—in a way men cannot be. That is an inexpungable fact of life; instead of being grateful, it seems to piss women off.

Many people justify abortion on compassionate grounds, saying they don't want to bring a child into a world that doesn't share their own sense of compassion. The vague notion underlying my abortions, and I suspect of the vast majority of other women's as well, is the idea that *there wouldn't be enough to go round*—not enough time, not enough energy, not enough space, not enough people to help. But when I examined my motives honestly, I realized that though I *said* not enough for the kid, I *meant* not enough for me. I mouthed platitudes about the global population boom; in fact, I was most worried about overcrowding in my own bedroom. I chafed against the "enforced labor" of motherhood while accepting without question the prevailing consumer ethic that sentences the vast majority of us to a lifetime of economic servitude. The truth in my case is that there was not only enough to go round, there would probably have been more than most of the rest of the world will ever enjoy: maybe not an expensive home or fancy cars—I don't have those things now—but nourishing food and a roof over our heads and comfortable clothes. There would have been books and music and museums. It would have meant sacrifice, deferred plans, missed vacations, no slipcovered down sofa, no hundred-dollar shoes, but there would have been enough. The truth was that I simply did not want to share.

My sense of neurotic guilt is as highly developed as anyone else's. In the course of renouncing my own sins, I know I run the risk of romanticizing the virtues of others. I am attracted, for instance, to the starry-eyed view that every mother is fully conscious of having safeguarded a great mystery and, in the care and education of her child, will continue to do so. I tend to stereotype the Mexican women in my neighborhood as being "natural" mothers and caretakers, with the ability to sacrifice running in their blood. "I have different genes," I tell myself. "I come from a different culture...." This is as far removed from reality and just as wrongheaded as saying that every woman who has an abortion is selfish and irresponsible. The truth is that each of us is a combination of various moral strengths and weaknesses, which is precisely why all need to be held to the same standard. I can't ask for an exception because I think, erroneously or not, that caretaking and doing without are inherently easier for some other group of women, just as the woman with less money or fewer resources can't ask for an exception because some other people have more.

I recently heard a female physician from Wisconsin glee-

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fully relate how she couldn't pass up the offer to become an abortionist because she came from the land of Senator Joe McCarthy. The irony, she said, was too delicious. But, in fact, there is no irony, just sad proof that violence, whatever form it takes, always begets more. The doctor went on to say that there was really only one reason that women get abortions: it just wasn't time. The majority of the women who came into her clinic had been anti-abortion—until they got pregnant—which, she noted, put them in a "terrible psychological bind." It occurred to me that the bind was rather more spiritual than psychological, and that having an abortion was an odd way to resolve it. Concluding that it isn't time now presumes that somewhere down the road it will be time. The idea that killing an unborn child now will contribute to the parenting skills you hope to develop in the future is a dubious proposition.

Still, the hearts of these women were in a better place than where mine had been: my feeling was that the time to disrupt *my* life would *never* be right. To be honest, I often still feel that way. But I have also come to believe that there is an invisible dimension where the smallest act of creation, or love, holds us together; where destruction, no matter how it is rationalized, or what it is called, inevitably tears us apart. I am convinced, for instance, that if Flannery O'Connor hadn't faithfully sat at her desk writing four hours a day, day after day, every week of her adult life, even when swollen and crippled with pain, that I would not have finally quit my job as a lawyer so I could write, would not have agonized over this essay, would not have recently been received into the Catholic church. There is something unimaginably, mysteriously powerful at work that is called, I'm told, the Communion of Saints.

If I discovered today I was pregnant, I hope my convictions would be steadfast and unwavering. I hope I would know enough to weigh my fear—of birth defects, of making do with less, of not being a good parent, of noise and anxiety and lack of sleep—against the possibility that a child would change me in ways I cannot imagine, in aspects of my life that probably desperately need changing. I hope that I would be so filled with joy and anticipation and wild, abandoned love for the life inside me that it wouldn't occur to me for a second to destroy it. I hope so, but I can't be sure. And although part of my faith is believing I've been forgiven, what I have to live with is the knowledge that three times I forfeited the opportunity to receive the very kind of transforming grace I long for now with all my heart—because I didn't think it was time.

At Jon's Grocery on Eighth and Normandie the other day, a dark-skinned woman with wide hips, short legs, and a shopping bag on each arm, waited patiently while her shrieking little boy took a twenty-five-cent ride on a mechanical horse. Two other children with dirty faces tugged on either side of her skirt, one dripping ice cream, the other waving a toy gun. We had each made our choices, the Latina mother and I, and though the cries of a hungry brat will never wake me, I couldn't help but wonder which one of us rests easier in the long, noisy nights. □

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Richard Alleva

THE TRUE VS. THE CORRECT

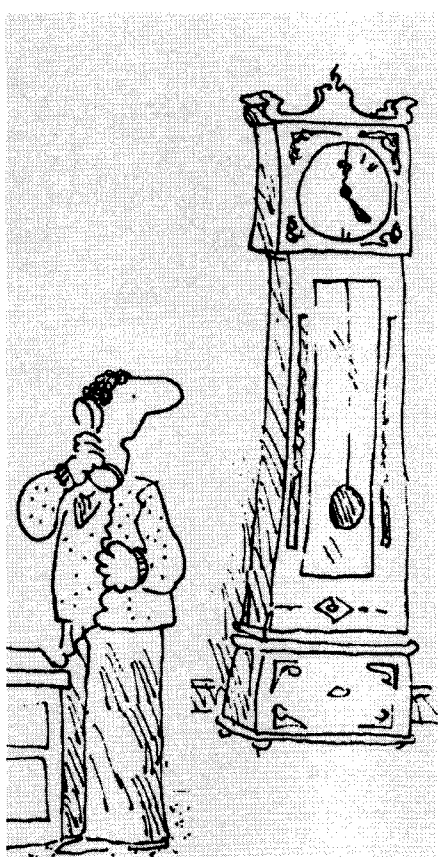
'A Family Thing' & 'Antonia's Line'

Touring the South in 1955, the writer Paul Goodman observed some white children coming out of school. Later, he noted in his journal, "Most of them look like little English farmers crossed with Negro and a dash of Greek Indian: muddy blond hair, sallow skin, flashing black eyes, big square teeth. If the purpose of segregation is to prevent miscegenation, it is a little late. But obviously there is a desperate need to manufacture a distinction, to exteriorize some internal split in the soul."

Near the beginning of *A Family Thing*, Earl Pilcher (Robert Duvall), as ornery a son of the Old South as you are likely to meet, discovers that he can't "manufacture a distinction" any longer. His deceased mother has left him a letter explaining that she was only his adoptive parent, that his father raped the black housekeeper sixty-odd years ago, that Earl is the issue of that violent union, that he has an elder, entirely black half-brother (the legitimate son of the housekeeper, who died giving birth to Earl), and that her deathbed charge is for Earl to seek out and take care of his other family. Pilcher, a bigot by habit, not principle, and just the sort some of us would dismiss as a redneck, is also—and there's no contradiction here, as the filmmakers wisely realize—an honorable man. So he proceeds to Chicago where his half-brother works as a security guard. It's not just a matter of family obligation: Earl feels discombobulated and is looking for roots now that his old sense of himself has been shattered.

I love this movie but, artistically, it is decidedly a mixed bag. Its one large defect slaps you in the face before the film is twenty minutes old. You realize that Earl is going to march through a series of confrontations with his new kin that will include moments of leashed hostility, guarded tolerance, outright violence (oh yes, the brothers duke it out), crises of conscience, and finally the wholehearted union of the brothers at the grave of their mother. This plot has marching orders and never shows any inclination to be insubordinate.

However, it's *only* the plot that's stale. The secure direction (by Richard Pearce), the flavorsome dialogue (by Billy Bob Thornton and Tom Epperson, the same team who wrote the superb *One False Move*), the choice and use of locations, the photography (by Fred Murphy), the editing, and—above all—the acting of every single role, make this predictable movie not just watchable but stirring, endearing, alive. So there is an aesthetic paradox to *A Family Thing*. Its overall design seems dictated by the old Hollywood need to make 'em laugh, make 'em cry, by telling 'em exactly what they already know, but each moment that fulfills the design was executed by artists trying to tell the truth as vividly as possible.



"How will you recognize me...er... I know—I'll be carrying a grandfather clock."

One example: that obligatory fight scene staged and acted by the usual Hollywood mechanics, would have had the brothers pounding away with amplified punches on the soundtrack sounding like fast balls hitting a catcher's mitt. But Pearce and his actors—Duvall and James Earl Jones—knew that these battlers are old, out-of-shape, and really quite reluctant to hurt each other. They end up flat on their backs in a tangle of arms and legs, huffed, chuffed, and preposterous. The scene's hokey melodrama wonderfully modulates into a very human comedy. In fact, the best scenes are the comic ones, especially a great sequence in which the drunken Duvall, trying to wade his way into his new "blackness," cozies up to a black family (complete strangers) celebrating the wife's birthday at a nightspot, buys the table drinks, insists on dancing with the "birthday girl" (a dignified matron), and then proceeds to lecture the astonished group on the evils of quotas. Only the more "serious" moments, like Duvall's discovery of the urban homeless during a nocturnal wander, betray this movie's rather moldy schema.

Irma P. Hall, an old actress new to me, is perfect as a tart-tongued and utterly Christian aunt shared by the brothers. Michael Beach, a young actor familiar to me from his TV work, hits the mark as a resentful nephew. James Earl Jones, who suffered from speech problems in his childhood, gives the tower-of-strength Ray a delicate stammer on the consonant "R" that opens a vista of frailty in this elderly, compassionate Samson.

About Robert Duvall's Earl I would like to fill tomes, but let me only draw attention to the way he reads his late

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foster mother's letter out loud to his father, the very man that the letter reveals as a rapist. Naturally, Duvall has Earl break down midway. That's practically dictated by the scene as written. But, just before the tears, comes a frightening hiss on an intake of breath which prepares us for, and *justifies*, the tears. Again, true art mitigates, almost obliterates, cliché. This is Duvall's most fully achieved work since *Tender Mercies*.

A Family Thing is a pearl enclosed within a plastic oyster. My advice to discriminating moviegoers: if you really want a pearl, it's not hard to pry open plastic.

Touch the base of the back of your neck. Now nod your head a few times. Do you feel the muscles there that gently work each time you nod? These are what you need to exercise before seeing Marleen Gorris's *Antonia's Line*, the Dutch film that won the Oscar for best foreign language film of 1995. For the only way to enjoy this movie is to keep nodding in approval at, and in agreement with, all—and I do mean *all*—of the heroine's decisions and all of her daughter's decisions and all of her granddaughter's decisions (this is a multigenerational saga), and unless those muscles I indicated are in shape, you just might begin to feel a pain in the neck. And if this pain prevents you, even for an instant, from nodding approval, you just might begin to feel your gorge rising at a movie so hermetically sealed in political correctness that your only recourse will be to rent the latest James Bond movie. (And, come to think of it, the heroine of *Goldeneye* was a lot more convincing as a liberated woman than anyone in *Antonia's Line*.)

This movie is a feminist pastoral. In the late forties, Antonia, accompanied by her teen-aged daughter, returns to the farmland of her youth after a twenty-year absence to bid good-by—or good riddance—to her dying mother. Once the old lady is buried (not an easy task, since she keeps popping up from her deathbed to croak obscenities and imprecations), Antonia takes over the farm. We might ask why, since she obviously despises most of her neighbors and professes no particular love of the agrarian life. We might also ask: where has she been for the past two decades? What was her life like under the Nazi occupation? Why did she leave the farm in the first place? Why doesn't her daughter, who has artistic ambitions, more strenuously object to living in the sticks? But don't ask. Just keep nodding.

Soon, Antonia's daughter wants a baby. A husband, too? Don't be fatuous. Scarcely blinking, Antonia provides a young stud to function as a human sperm bank. And when the village priest denounces the unwed mother-to-be, Antonia entraps the priest in a sexual act and blackmails him into speaking more charitably in the pulpit Sunday morning. What's that you say? Qualms about a woman who uses a young girl as sexual bait? And to gain what? Good words from a priest whose religion Antonia doesn't believe in? (And why does Antonia go to Mass every Sunday though she states unambiguously that she is an atheist?) Good will from a congregation whose members Antonia apparently has little to do with? But don't ask. Just keep nodding.

Suffice it to say that the absurdities are multiplied as "time flows, as season follows season" (yes, the narration is full of folksy fakery of that order). The film, though crisply put together, has no particular style, since its fantastical flourishes are all borrowed from Fellini's *Amarcord* and certain Latin American novels of the "magic realism" school. Worst of all, Gooris never asks for a complex response from her audience. Could the priest have perhaps an atom of real piety in his sanctimonious nature? Of course not! He's a fraud who can only attain a certain goofy humanity by shedding his cassock and fathering twelve children upon a human baby-making machine. When Antonia's granddaughter who (natch) is a genius in both music and mathematics, incites a student walkout on a professor who dares to criticize her for handing in a five-page paper when he wanted two, we aren't permitted by the staging of the scene to wonder if the teacher might have a valid complaint (isn't conciseness considered a definite virtue in higher mathematics?), but must consider him a bigoted numskull for not conceding the unquestionable genius of the girl. If there is such a thing as dramaturgical bigotry, this movie has it, in spades. □

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A critic worthy of Chekhov

Chekhov's Plays
Richard Gilman
Yale University Press, $30, 261 pp.

Celia Wren

Chekhov is known for his dictum that a gun hanging on a wall in the first act of a play must fire before the close of the final scene. But his own plays are far more dramatically oblique than this famous maxim would suggest. They draw power from fleeting humors and much talk—characters that brood, waffle, reminisce, declare love, renege, and laugh and cry simultaneously. In his insightful reading of the plays, Richard Gilman explains that, while making no formal innovations to the drama of the time, Chekhov did defy conventions of plot, theme, and character. Refusing to staff the plays with heroes or villains, shaking the moods free of unalleviated tragedy or comedy, and muddying emotions that might too easily fall into cliché, the playwright opted for "the implicit where we would have expected the overt, discontinuities, leaps, gaps, breaks in dramatic logic."

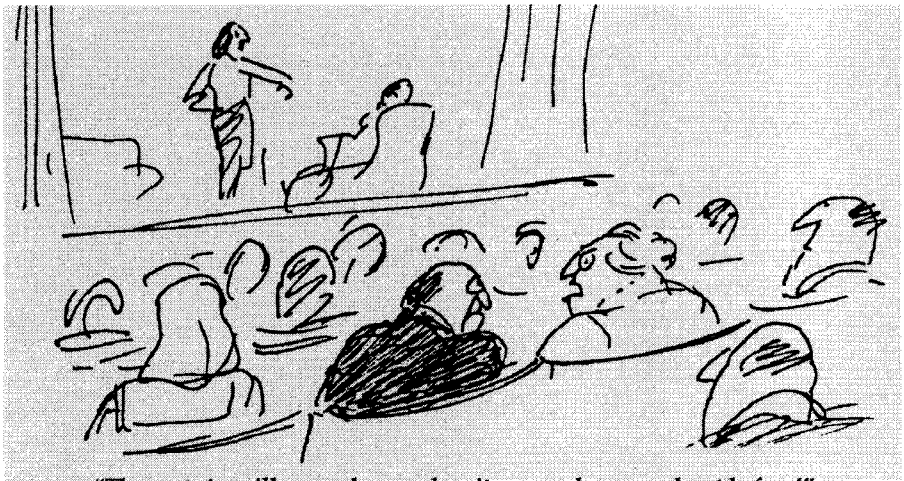
An image Gilman returns to several times is that of "language and actions...filling in a field, not moving in any sort of conventional straight line." The conceit is particularly useful in explaining the plays' language, which is never linear. When he describes the nonsequiturs and inconsistencies that jostle the flow of Chekhov's dialogue, Gilman brings in the splendid German word *aneinandervorbeisprechen* ("talking past one another"—used to describe the speech of characters in the early nineteenth-century plays of Büchner).

The "field" conceit also helps Gilman explain in what sense the plays are dramatic, despite the paucity of conventional plot: in the place of "linear, destination-bound" action, Chekhov substituted a stream of characters with independent desires, frustrations, and ideas. Each play incorporates "a revolving dramatic field...which as it turns gives us glimpses of successive arrangements of feeling and idea, connectedness and disconnection, participations near the center of the imaginative frame or farther away."

Out of context this kind of argument can sound so refined as to be mystical. In context, with a large number of quotes to back it up, it is quite convincing. Devoting one chapter to each of Chekhov's five major plays (*Ivanov, The Seagull, Uncle Vanya, Three Sisters, The Cherry Orchard*), Gilman uses close readings to inspire and illustrate his definition of Chekhov's original technique. He sets the plays in the context of the theater of their time, but also lets his reflections range more widely, making connections that are more poetic than analytical: just before plunging into an examination of *The Cherry Orchard*'s opening moments, for example, he stops to remark, inside a humble parenthesis, "The four acts of *Three Sisters*. The language and rhythm of this sentence irresistibly bring to mind Gertrude Stein's and Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts*...."

As this playful observation shows, Gilman's own style is associative—a field rather than a line. "I do lay the responsibility at Chekhov's feet," Gilman says, "....his own digressive style is infectious...." When he runs ahead of his argument, dodges backwards, takes advantage of a space break to change tack, or pauses after a quotation to emphasize and interpret specific words before linking them to words in other passages, Gilman sometimes sounds as though he cannot restrain his enthusiasm for the subtlety and philosophical depth of Chekhov's work.

What distinguishes the plays fundamentally, Gilman maintains, is their resistance to being summarized, labeled, or otherwise reduced on any level. Themes—even recurrent ones like the passage of time, or the importance of work—are always too deeply meshed into the writing to be easily analyzed.



"The curtain will come down when it comes down, and not before!"

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Characters are always more than the sum of their situations, and behavior never stems from simple motives. And innumerable important issues can barely be discussed, because their significance comes from omission, so that the plays' glory lies in "a matter of spaces, rests, things left unsaid or undone but implicit, tacit, like hovering notes unsounded."

Seen in this light, apparently simple plot devices gain an almost metaphysical weight. Toward the end of the book, for example, Gilman attempts to explain an apparent awkwardness at the start of *Three Sisters*. In her opening speech, Olga recites the salient facts in the family's history over the previous year: "Father died just a year ago, on this very day—the fifth of May...It was very cold, snow was falling...." So much background, recalled for no apparent reason, just when the audience needs it—this speech can seem absurdly clumsy coming from the pen of a writer like Chekhov.

But Gilman has a justification, albeit a rather abstract one. The speech is meant to perplex, he argues, to lure our minds away from the level of pure realism, thus leaving them open to the play of emotional significance. Olga is not speaking to anyone; she speaks because she is "thoughtful" and thoughtfulness in a Chekhov character is "the surprise and seriousness of the mind when feeling passes into awareness." Thought, feeling, and speech, in *Three Sisters* and the other plays, are all connected by an eerie current that runs through the mystery of things.

This kind of explication is not always easy to follow, but Gilman always expresses himself beautifully. Packed with provocative thoughts, his book will be particularly edifying to anyone under the impression that Chekhov's plays all take place on the same decaying estate, frequented by droves of aimless gentry, where, beyond a long avenue of fir trees, an offstage pistol shot from time to time reminds us that we are all even worse off than we'd thought. □

Celia Wren *works for Hospital Audiences, Inc., a nonprofit arts/social services organization in New York City.*

CAN JAPAN CONSUME MORE?

The Weight of the Yen
R. Taggart Murphy
W. W. Norton, $25, 352 pp.

John Buell

Mainstream academics and journalists like to tell us that one of the few points on which all economists agree is the value of free trade. Until very recently, however, no one bothered to pass this wisdom on to the Japanese. And despite their ignorance, their economy has become the world's strongest and most productive.

R. Taggart Murphy's *The Weight of the Yen* is a very readable—often even gripping—account of the rise of Japanese economic power. Unlike other recent celebrations of Japan, Murphy's analysis highlights major flaws not only in classical free trade but also in Japan's nationalistic industrial policy.

In the years following the Second World War, leading Japanese bureaucrats decided that Japan must focus on economic security. Murphy characterizes their major corporate structures as "alliances for mutual protection in a world in which nothing is certain." Consequently, this corporate leadership decided that the capital to finance economic expansion would be raised exclusively from domestic sources.

In pursuing these ends, two Japanese ministries played a vital role. The Ministry of International Trade and Industry did extensive market and technical research, targeting areas in which Japan

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could use its talents and resources to gain a market niche. It then ensured that the whole process could be integrated to foster speed and efficiency in production of the final product. Selective tariffs and other policies cementing supportive relations between manufacturers and suppliers were key elements in early success. The Ministry of Finance then allocated capital on a preferential basis to those firms that played crucial strategic roles in strengthening the Japanese economy.

How did Japan generate the savings and the capital it needed? Japan is a high-wage society. But land, housing costs, and most ordinary retail goods are very expensive as well. These high costs are not an accident. The Japanese are big savers, a virtue we are frequently told Americans lack. Yet this virtue grows out of the singular mindset of the Japanese economic elites that run the country. Government planners keep land off the market and discourage use of credit. Basic public education is free, but slots for elite education are scarce and require much commitment of time and money. Bureaucrats have thus managed to make saving a necessity.

By squeezing their own people and targeting their investments, Japan achieved continuous improvements in productivity. Cheaper and better goods allowed markets to grow and costs to dip. Even in the face of periodic revaluations of its currency, making its goods more costly in dollar terms, the Japanese simply accepted sharp reductions in profits in order to keep their share of the market expanding.

The Japanese economy is a miracle. Tokyo itself now produces 5 percent of the world's GNP. This miracle, however, has exhausted its people and disrupted the foundations of the world economy. When one economic superpower runs ever larger balances of trade against other major economies, it in effect cripples its own prosperity. Simply put, the many U. S. firms driven out of business by Japanese competition can no longer produce the goods and services U. S. citizens must produce if they are to earn enough to buy more goods from Japan.

For nearly a decade these consequences could be ignored because the Japanese were willing to dispose of their own surpluses by loaning them back to the U. S. by buying our Treasury bonds. Nonetheless, as U. S trade and government debt continued to grow, the very stability of the dollar came into question. These instabilities threatened not only the world economy but even the many Japanese institutions holding U.S. dollars.

The world economy in the last two decades has been driven increasingly by the debt and consumption of one nation, the United States, and the production of another, Japan. This ponzi scheme is unsustainable. However, simply to cut off the deficit spigot with no further changes in domestic or international economies is only a different road to depression.

R. Taggart Murphy, an investment banker and journalist, argues that the United States must practice more fiscal prudence and employ firm but sensitive negotiation with Japan on trade. His analysis is prescient but his prescriptions less precise. Part of an adequate policy agenda would lie in getting the Japanese to consume a little more, so that total world consumption would more closely approximate world production and U. S. governmental and trade deficits could be reduced. Japan could thus play a broader role in sustaining the world economy. Prudence in the U. S. must also include a better effort to employ all our citizens and give them greater voice in the way our scarce capital is deployed.

Similarly, one of the great strengths of Murphy's book lies in his recognition that if economic policy in Japan is to change, the power of its bureaucracy must be challenged. There are, in fact, many signs of political unrest in Japan. If fair trade practices were required of all trading partners and if they were designed to help working-class citizens in Japan and other nations, these initiatives might occasion less nationalistic backlash.

Shortly before his death, John Maynard Keynes recognized that a world of increasingly free trade could be destroyed by beggar-thy-neighbor trade policies. He advocated negotiation of an international economic framework that would stimulate a high-wage, high-growth form of trade. Exchange rates would be pegged within narrow bands, and any nation persistently in surplus to the whole trading system would face automatic, internationally imposed tariffs. Such a system would provide financial stimulus for those healthy economies to expand consumption and stimulate worldwide growth. In today's world—at least the most industrialized segments of it—one might also argue that trade agreements should foster more growth in the form of shorter working hours and more family and leisure time.

One virtue of Keynes's model is that trade responsibilities are defined through broadly negotiated treaties. Trade surpluses are also measured against a whole system, not in the context of periodic attacks by one power on another. Trade and development issues can no longer be resolved simply through actions by any one government, however large. Nonetheless, world government is clearly neither possible nor desirable. The only prospect for peace and development lies in the open, democratic negotiation of new trade frameworks that allow some domestic industrial policies but also recognize each nation's obligation to the whole system. Such an approach to trade could strengthen and in turn be aided by democratic reform movements in the major industrial nations. Without such movements, we will have little more than sterile debate between advocates of "free trade" and those embracing the most xenophobic alternatives. □

John Buell *is the author of* Democracy by Other Means: The Politics of Work, Leisure, and Environment *(University of Illinois Press).*

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CLASSY HISTORY

Byzantium
The Decline and Fall
John Julius Norwich
Alfred A. Knopf, $35, 488 pp.

Carl L. Bankston III

In the days before social history and statistical "cliometrics," the word "history" implied thick, multivolume chronological narratives of events, usually political and military in nature and almost invariably the consequences of the decisions and actions of kings, emperors, and other leading individuals. This type of history, of course, has not disappeared, any more than novels with traditional plot structures disappeared following Robbe-Grillet. Like the traditional novel, the older sort of history, with its linear sequence of events and focus on individual actors, may often be more approachable for the general reader. John Julius Norwich's three-volume history of the Byzantine empire, which now culminates in *Byzantium: The Decline and Fall*, is a charming and entertaining piece of traditional history telling.

Norwich does not claim that his work represents a scholarly investigation of the Eastern Empire. In the introduction to this last volume, he cheerfully admits having relied on modern translations of his primary sources because of the inadequacy of his Greek. Original scholarship is not his goal. His goal is to tell the Byzantine story in a manner that will bring this important, but too often ignored, part of the human past to the attention of nonspecialized readers.

The first two volumes, *Byzantium: The Early Centuries* and *Byzantium: The Apogee*, covered the emergence, during the early Middle Ages, of a distinctively Greek empire in the Roman East and the empire's glory as a center of Christian civilization through the eleventh century. Westerners—that is, those of us who are heirs to the Latin half of Christendom—have long held two contradictory preconceptions of the Byzantine state during these years. First, like Yeats, we have tended to echo the wonder of bedazzled early Frankish visitors to Constantinople, imagining Byzantium as a kind of never-never land in which classical time stood still. Second, following Gibbon, we still use the adjective "Byzantine" to mean "duplicitous, tricky, untrustworthy." Norwich's first volumes did much to rescue the medieval Greeks from these prejudices. He portrayed their state as an impressive, but human enterprise; he showed how clever diplomacy, as well as military force, was necessary to maintain Eastern Rome through centuries of facing new threats and enemies on all sides.

This last volume recounts the tragedy of this great state's decay, humiliation, and death. It begins on a somewhat hopeful note in the late eleventh century, with the rise to power of Alexius I Comnenus a decade after the resounding defeat of Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes by the Seljuk Turks at Manzikert. Alexius is probably, after Justinian, the Eastern emperor best known to most readers, thanks to the writings of his daughter, Anna Comnena. Alexius was a genuinely heroic figure and he did much to resuscitate the empire after Manzikert and to defend it from the threat of the Normans in Sicily. But none of the succeeding emperors seems to have equaled Alexius, and Byzantium was caught between the expanding power of Western Europe, expressed in the Crusades that began during the reign of Alexius, and the expanding power of the Turks. In the disgraceful Fourth Crusade of the early thirteenth century, the Latin knights allowed the Venetians to convince them to seize Constantinople instead of proceeding to Egypt, shattering the empire. By the late fourteenth

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century, the Ottoman Turks held most of the territory formerly under the Romans in the East and the emperor had become a Turkish vassal.

I wondered, as I read this book, what difference it would have made if the emperors of the final four centuries had been of a higher quality. Perhaps little, since Byzantium's strength at its apogee lay in the fact that it alone retained the institutional organization of the ancient world. But it also suffered from the same institutional weaknesses that plagued Rome: excessive centralization of power and no smooth, well-established means of legitimate succession in leadership. Its socioeconomic system, moreover, had been increasingly based on large landowners, who were mostly exempt from taxation, and this not only made it hard to raise revenue, it also inhibited the development of merchant classes and prevented Byzantium from competing with the trading cities of Venice and Genoa. The structure of the empire, then, was politically inadequate to contend with increasingly well-organized military foes and economically inadequate to contend with incipient capitalism. Norwich's traditional emphasis on personalities leads him to largely overlook such root causes of Byzantium's decline.

The book's almost exclusive concern with high politics and diplomacy, another characteristic of traditional history, leaves little room for discussion of monasticism or theology, key matters in this theocentric society. The peasantry, who made up the overwhelming majority of the population, do not appear at all in these pages, and even members of the landowning class only find their way into the narrative when they have dealings with the ruling dynasties.

Although readers should keep these limitations in mind, they will find that this book and its two predecessors have much to offer. Norwich has previously written several travel books, and his style possesses the concreteness and descriptive richness of a good travelogue. The writing is witty and anecdotal and he manages to bring his characters to life, although he may occasionally employ a little too much imagination. Norwich has a habit of telling his readers about the thoughts and feelings of the long-dead emperors, and, while these psychological insights are interesting, it is frequently unclear whether they are based on evidence from primary sources or simply on the author's own speculations and conjectures.

The strictly chronological ordering of the narrative, following the lives of the rulers, makes it easy to follow and dates have been printed at the top of every other page. The family trees of the dynasties and of various Latin rulers help clarify the complicated kinship relations among the major players.

The clashes of the spiritual descendants of the Latin West, the Greek East, and the Ottoman Muslims demand our attention today every time we pick up a newspaper or turn on the television and see another report on the Balkans. Norwich's highly readable history can serve as a useful and pleasurable introduction to the state at the core of this old triangle, the Greek empire. □

Carl L. Bankston III *teaches sociology and anthropology at the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette.*

DOUBLE JEOPARDY

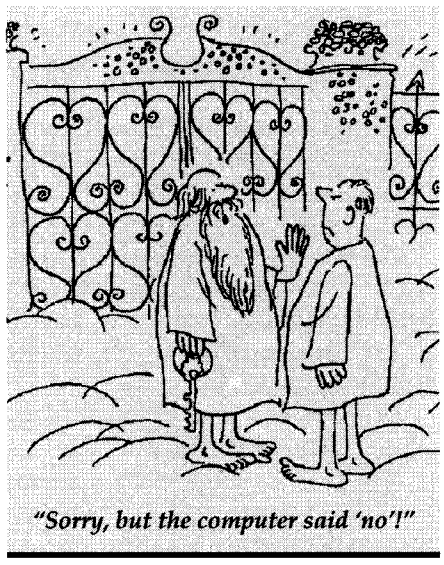
God Owes Us Nothing
Leszek Kolakowski
University of Chicago Press, $22.50, 238 pp.

Dennis O'Brien

I suppose it was bound to happen. For the past three years, *Commonweal* has been sending me books proclaiming theories of determinism: our overt behavior is really not what it seems, but the necessary action of a computer-like nervous system, basic sexual patterns, genes. It only stands to reason, then, that I should be asked to complete this series by reviewing a book on Divine Determinism, a.k.a., predestination.

Leszek Kolakowski's basic interest is the theology of Blaise Pascal. The first section of the book, however, is devoted to an extensive discussion of the Jansenist background of Pascal's thought. This section makes for hard reading—hard not only because the arguments of the Jansenists and their Jesuit opponents are intricate, but because they are so manifestly offensive. There is, for instance, a careful dissection of the doctrine of *double* predestination, a position not much discussed, I suspect, even in the descendent churches of John Calvin who thought well of the doctrine. The issue in double predestination as against simple predestination was whether when God elects some for salvation, he *also* elects some for perdition. The milder view is that God does elect some for salvation, but he does not directly will anyone to perdition; he simply fails to give them the effective grace they would need to be saved. Kolakowski suggests that this is a distinction without a difference. Indeed.

The proponents of predestination (double or simple), were alike in putting



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forth a view of God's action which seems not only to undermine moral effort, but would seem to most twentieth-century readers downright "immoral." Thus, Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638) gives explicit approval to the work of an Irish monk that there is no salvation for dead unbaptized infants who, because they have not been cleansed of original sin, "go into eternal fire." Since it was also doctrine that the blessed rejoiced in the sufferings of the damned (rejoicing in God's justice), one must imagine the parents celebrating the suffering of their unfortunate infants. And what "justice" is there in "Original Sin"—the visitation of the fault of Adam on all his descendants? Pascal says that if one is troubled by this strange "justice," it only shows how different (and exalted) God's justice is from our miserable human conception.

Why all this stirring about election, predestination, and divine grace in seventeenth-century France? Kolakowski lucidly explains the various philosophical, religious, and social strands that created such heat over these arcane theological views. Basically, there were two world views battling for supremacy: the Renaissance "*vision du monde*... was based on...an optimistic belief in universal harmony and a network of correspondences between microcosmos and macrocosmos." In contrast was the vision—well expressed in Pascal—that the world is "alien, hostile, and threatening." By and large, the Jesuits adopted the first view, Jansenists the second. A benevolent God for a benevolent world would probably not condemn unbaptized infants to the fire, but more important, he would certainly be able to overlook the peccadillos of the *libertin* bourgeois and *noblesse*. There is no usury if the creditor takes the money as a sign of gratitude. Almsgiving is a duty, but only from our excess, but since hardly anyone has excess—even kings, etc.

These examples were lampooned by Pascal in the *Provincial Letters* as examples of the pernicious Pelagianism of the Jesuit Molinists. Casuistry and excuses for bad deeds are of no value—but neither are good deeds. The world is not benevolent, it is not a place of possible good deeds and plausible excuses; the world is unmitigated evil and sin from which we can only be rescued by divine action. We are not saved by works, but by God's free choice and grace. We are not paid back for our "goodness": God owes us nothing.

Such was Jansen's doctrine in his great unfinished treatise *Augustinus*. Kolakowski asks why the official church finally rejected Jansen and what seems to be the mainline of Augustinian theology. Jansenism was brutally suppressed by the state authorities, to be sure, not because of its theology, but because a Europe jittery from a century of religious warfare wanted no more sectarian conflict. The Jesuits "won" with the "semi-Pelagian" notion that humans "cooperate" with divine grace, they are not pawns of divine destiny. Kolakowski judges that it is well that the Jesuits prevailed since their view has been the church's open door to modernity's belief in change and progress. At the same time, however, he sees the quarrel be-

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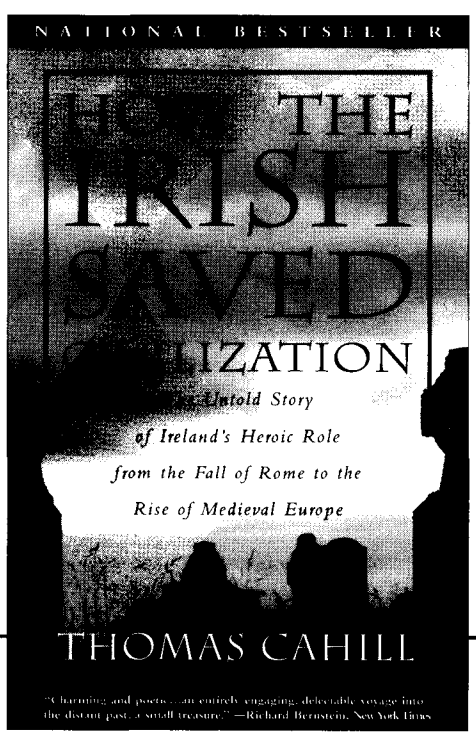
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THE IRISH SAVED CIVILIZATION
The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe
THOMAS CAHILL

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tween grace and goodness as a permanent tension within the Christian churches.

The second section of the book details what Kolakowski labels Pascal's "sad religion." He contrasts the Pascalian/Augustinian position to a "tragic" view. In the tragic view, the protagonist is faced with nothing but morally wrong choices—the fault line is in the situation, not in the inherent evil of the one who acts. Under predestination the *actor* is wrong—unless she has been mysteriously elected by God's grace. As Kolakowski concludes, this view has "made many Christians wonder why divine justice should be called justice at all."

God Owes Us Nothing is a brisk, clarifying discussion not only of what seems at first a quarrel best forgotten, but of perennial issues for Christian faith—or for anyone worried about the "meaning of life." (Pascal's *Pensées* was not directed to believers, but to skeptics.) No matter how deep the Pelagian temptation, it finally fails somewhere before a doctrine of grace. God owes us nothing. But are the dreadful doctrines of predestination then not the inevitable outcome? Either we *earn* salvation through works (cooperative work even), or we are *given* salvation from God's mysterious will. A Christian must come to terms with Augustine, Calvin, Pascal, et al., and with all this machinery of election and divine determination. Modernity is, of course, appalled by predestination as an assault on human freedom and responsibility. However, the other, ultramodern, "scientific" books I have been reviewing for *Commonweal* recently seem delighted with cybernetic or genetic determinism—which seem to me to be just as destructive of human worth as the most ironclad Calvinism. Is determinism from above any better than determinism from below (genes)? Aren't both rejections of free will and human value?

However, this is only a book review, not a section of a *Summa*. I end with a suggestion. Augustine—who got us into this mess—was a unique figure who, it can be argued, *invented* the very idea of the individual and the *will* which is the mark of same. The *Confessions* is radically new: an *autobiographical* document, the story of an individual soul in dialogue with God. His question is not how to reduce or eliminate the will in terms of some general laws of nature, but how is this human individual will directed by that other will, the will of God. One can understand how the will of the general commands my will as a *faithful* soldier. Now, is "faithful soldier" just another word for "human automaton"? It often sounds that way in all the metaphysics of divine election, but that cannot be the case without evaporating the notion of "faithful"—along with "will" and "individual." For Augustine, the *individual* is grounded in the One God, not dissolved into the many genes. This powerful insight tends to get expressed in whatever available metaphysical *theory* is hanging around. To the extent that theory loves the universal, it has a hard time finding the *individual*—thus distorting a profound religious sensibility into grand and grotesque opinions about the machinery of destiny. Philosophizing about divine grace may be the root mistake. □

Dennis O'Brien *is president emeritus of the University of Rochester.*

TUTORED OPINION

The Voice of the People
Public Opinion and Democracy
James S. Fishkin
Yale University Press, $20, 195 pp.

Timothy A. Byrnes

Would a flat tax help or harm the United States economy? Does "community policing" lower urban crime rates? Is a balanced budget by 2002 necessary for the country's fiscal health or not? Should the United States enforce the fragile peace in Bosnia? These are some of the central questions facing America in this presidential election year. But according to James S. Fishkin, in *The Voice of the People*, the press is indisposed to treat these questions seriously; the public is ill-equipped to answer them intelligently; and therefore candidates have little incentive to debate them responsibly.

The problem, according to Fishkin, is that our political culture has elevated the status and political influence of public opinion without taking adequate account of the degree to which that opinion is uninformed and reflexive. We are treated, he argues, to the common spectacle of government officials and political candidates slavishly deferring to the wishes of a public that might not really know what it wishes. Ask people what they think of Bosnia and they will give you an answer, even if they have never thought of Bosnia before you asked them the question. Ask people about the flat tax, and they will mouth back to you the superficial analysis and assessments offered on last night's evening news. Public opinion, "the giant who rules America," in Fishkin's terms, "may stand over presidents and senators, but it is constructed from the most ineffable of materials—the casual im-

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pressions of ordinary citizens."

Fishkin's purpose in writing *The Voice of the People* is to tout a new form of opinion survey he calls "deliberative polling." Rather than calling a random sample of the citizenry on the telephone and asking them to express opinions they may not have, invite a similarly random sample of the population to a weekend of seminars, lectures, and discussions on the issues of the day. (In fact, Fishkin organized just such a gathering last January in Austin, Texas, and much of it was broadcast on PBS.) Then, after they have spent time reading, talking, and most importantly thinking, ask them to express their opinions on complex issues facing the electorate at large. Through this process, Fishkin claims, pollsters will be able to determine what the general public would think on the issues if it had the opportunity to be as informed and as thoughtful as the random sample. That knowledge would in turn then serve as an incentive for the press to engage in more responsible "civic journalism," and for politicians to eschew simplistic soundbites in favor of reasoned and complex debate.

Deliberative polling strikes me as a pretty good idea whose value should not be oversold. It seems, to be honest, more like a marginally informative gimmick than like the key to elevating political discourse in America that Fishkin claims it to be. Indeed, why not seek the most informed and responsible opinion possible? Why not invite one small sample of the population to carefully consider and discuss among themselves their judgments and conclusions? But in so doing would we really, as Fishkin claims, be uncovering "the considered judgment of the entire country, in microcosm"? Do we have full confidence that the seminars and discussions of deliberative polling are immune from the kind of manipulation and artifice that mar standard opinion surveys? Would the experience of one group, even if randomly selected, with all the presumably unique dynamics associated with its various personalities and rhetorical styles, really replicate itself across a country of 250 million?

The central value of deliberative polling, it seems to me, is not its purported representativeness, but rather its potential to teach us that people have the capacity to reconsider their prejudices and to change their minds when they are given the time and intellectual space to do so. Fishkin offers, in fact, persuasive evidence that this is exactly what his methods produce. What we need to do, armed with this knowledge, is to devise educational, journalistic, and political reforms that will lead the "entire country," and not just a microcosm of it, to be more likely to turn off news programs that offer only horse-race coverage and spectacle, and more likely to hang up on pollsters who ask for only superficial impressions and opinions. If deliberative voting, and this straightforward and accessible book extolling its virtues, can move us just a bit in that direction, than it will have served a useful and laudable public service. □

Timothy A. Byrnes *teaches political science at Colgate University.*

'E PLURIBUS, PLURES'

Reinventing the American People
Unity and Diversity Today
Edited by Robert Royal
William B. Eerdmans, $17, 304 pp.

Patrick J. Deneen

As I imagine it, one afternoon at lunch or over a cup of coffee, Robert Royal and his colleagues at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C., were engaged in a lively discussion about some pressing issues of the day and suddenly realized that no single volume addressed the relationship between perhaps the two *hottest* themes in politics and academia today: communitarianism and multiculturalism. Inspired, Royal asked an impressive group of intellectuals, academics, and journalists to explore the connection between current theories of community — which at base assume a certain kind of unity—and multiculturalism, which alternatively celebrates the differences among peoples and cultures.

The volume's premise is entirely warranted, yet despite the book's stated intentions, the connection between community and "multiculture" remains elusive. That result is an inevitable consequence of collecting essays from a variety of sources: edited volumes are often strong on individual essays, but weak on a common vision. Indeed, the book itself is an ironic reflection on the difficulties of creating a multicultural community: if the stated theme com-

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prised a sort of community, the various participants' differing perspectives and understanding of the topics resulted in a multicultural stew—a very interesting and tasty stew, but one whose individual ingredients don't quite add up to a culinary masterpiece.

Still, *Reinventing the American People* does show how interesting a collection of divergent viewpoints can be, and how an unwitting internal debate forces the reader into the position of "shadow editor," in effect attempting to define the parameters of the argument. In particular, there seem to be two conceptions of multiculturalism at play. The first centers on multiculturalism as it is currently understood in academia, reflected by the rise of new disciplines such as women's studies. The second approach defines multiculturalism as the *de facto* ethnic and cultural diversity of America's population. Debate around this latter understanding tends to focus on the issue of immigration, specifically whether the continued influx of different ethnic groups threatens the cultural unity of America. Of course, there are interesting connections to be drawn between these two understandings of multiculturalism, but the essayists are content to treat them as separate phenomena.

The academic version of multiculturalism is put in proper perspective by many of the essayists, but most notably by Gertrude Himmelfarb, who views it as yet another in an interminable line of temporary intellectual fads. Other authors express a similar skepticism by emphasizing multiculturalism's inconsistencies. As Robert Royal points out, supporters of multicultural studies insist on two contradictory positions: first, that the white, male, Protestant class of the United States has throughout history systematically repressed minority groups, women, and homosexuals; and second, that these groups somehow, in spite of their repression, have managed to make significant contributions to the history and culture of the United States, a fact that has been ignored by the dominant culture. Either one of these propositions is worthy of debate, but they are not logically compatible. Challenging the intellectual consistency of multiculturalism in more profound ways is Harvey Mansfield, Jr. In a masterly essay, Mansfield contends that the philosophical heritage of multiculturalism rests on the very classical liberal thought against which it purports to rebel. By denying its heritage in the literature of toleration—inasmuch as this tradition was dominated by white male authors—supporters of multicultural studies are unable to defend the proposition that different cultures deserve universal respect and attention. Given the intellectual contradictions inherent in academic multiculturalism, the essayists in this volume have little difficulty or compunction dismissing it.

The second conception of multiculturalism, emphasizing the cultural diversity of the United States resulting from immigration, proves to be a more difficult subject and ultimately more interesting. Peter Skerry, in his essay "The New Politics of Immigration," is the only author who, in accordance with the stated intention of the book, explores the relationship between community and multiculturalism. Skerry recognizes that the United States has always been a multicultural society: indeed, proportional levels of immigration at the turn of the century exceeded today's rates. Previous immigrants were thought no less "unassimilable" than today's main immigrant groups of Asians and Hispanics. Though the dominant American culture treated insular Irish, Italian, and other ethnic communities with distrust, these groups melted into the larger American culture, adding the spice of their ethnic traditions to the mix, but accepting the dominant culture as their own.

The problem with assimilating today's immigrant groups is not based—as some contend—on their non-European background. Rather, Skerry points out, previous immigrant groups were drawn out of their insular communities and into the mainstream of American culture by strong mediating institutions: local political parties, churches, civic organizations, neighborhood institutions. For a multitude of economic and political reasons, these institutions have been severely weakened to the point of irrelevance today. He astutely asks whether we can assume that assimilation can succeed given the decline of these mediating institutions. Skerry is careful to distinguish between causes and effects. Unfortunately, he appears to conclude that reducing levels of immigration is the best solution, rather than attempting to strengthen those institutions that once so ably created Americans out of "any old nation that comes along," in G.K. Chesterton's words.

A few of the authors in the volume are explicitly concerned with the challenges facing America's civic institutions. George Weigel persuasively argues that America's Christian tradition has strongly undergirded its democratic character, particularly inasmuch as the Christian virtue of charity "displaces naked ambition as the motive for public service." However, a subsequent essay by Thomas C. Reeves notes that the mainline churches, which served as major sources of the civic virtue Weigel celebrates, have been in serious decline. According to Reeves, as the mainline churches have become more accommodating to multicultural demands for representation, their memberships have significantly decreased. Given the weakness of these churches, Reeves concludes that "it seems highly unlikely that our churches can contribute significantly to a much-needed sense of oneness among the American people."

Alternatively, Reeves notes that participation in new conservative churches has risen. However, a recent series of articles about fundamentalist Christians in *The Wall Street Journal*, raises questions about the extent to which these groups embrace democratic virtues. The Christians described demonstrate a vehement distrust and even rabid hatred of government and public institutions; they educate their children at home; they retreat from civic life to secure their personal salvation. The essayists of *Reinventing the American People* remind us that civic institutions can combat the worst effects of multiculturalism. Still, any reinvigoration of those institutions faces daunting, perhaps insurmountable difficulties. □

Patrick J. Deneen *is a speechwriter at the United States Information Agency in Washington, D.C.*

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Lawrence S. Cunningham

I am not expert enough to say if Father McNamee's poetry is "good" in any formal sense. My own clumsy attempts at sonnet writing have always left me frustrated by an incapacity to write fourteen lines on a single subject that scan, much less wrapping the whole thing up with a rhyming couplet. Nonetheless, I greatly admired his *Diary of a City Priest* (1993) in which this Philadelphia inner-city parish priest views his world with such an unerring eye. To that work of prose we can now add this volume.

Clay Vessels and Other Poems,
by John McNamee,
Sheed & Ward, $18.95, 66 pp.

Many of the poems are about people whom I treasure (Simone Weil; Henri de Lubac; Franz Jägerstätter; Graham Greene; Thomas Merton; Matthew Kelty) and places that have always moved me (Paris's church of Saint Severin; old inner-city parishes; Cape Sunion; the Dublin Bay of Joyce's *Portrait*; the desert of the Southwestern United States).

McNamee has an incarnational eye. Who, having ever looked at baroque painting, would not feel recognition at his Christmas poem which ends, "The Old masters knew what they were about/with the light coming off the Child"? Who would doubt a love for the poor in a poem in which, from the warmth of his car, the poet sees her "unseasonal white shoes her transit pass/her worn daily bag..." and decides that she is a "Madonna disappearing/in my rear view mirror." McNamee, in short, is a poet of the glimpse, but in his words the glimpse takes on sacramental meaning. In a poem describing the last rites given to an elderly patient, the priest poet sees a cleaning person about her duties; a humble person doing hidden work but "when Easter comes...I shall imagine him as graceful as the cleaning woman."

This rich volume is all the richer with the inclusion of a series of strong woodcuts made by the poet's friend, Robert McGovern. McGovern gives us good, thick assertive lines (just as woodcuts ought to do) tracing out Hopkins in his oversized collar and Simone Weil with those no-nonsense rimless glasses. In other words: this is a book to look at and to read and, preferably, when doing the latter, read out loud.

Father McNamee has an obvious love for the preconciliar French Catholicism which produced some of the boldest experiments and most creative scholarship of this century. As a young person I also went to Saint Severin to see its well-executed liturgy, read of the priest-workers, received inspiration from the Little Sisters and Brothers of Jesus, and immersed myself in the writings of Congar, Chenu, Daniélou, and de Lubac. For that reason alone I was glad to come across Charles Mann's biography of Madeleine Delbrel (whom I had never heard of before reading this book), who had a part in the Catholic renewal in France.

Madeleine Delbrel (1904–64), converted in the early 1930s, and moved to the town of Ivry, a Communist suburb of Paris—part of the "Red Belt" of the city. With a few companions who lived with her (these professional women resisted to the end becoming a secular institute or otherwise being categorized into one of the canonically acceptable "forms" of committed living), she decided to spend her life as a contemplative presence and social activist in a largely hostile political atmosphere. It was a mark of her success that by the outbreak of the war she was well integrated into the social fabric of Ivry, rendering mainly informal social services to the poorest and most abandoned of the area.

Madeleine Delbrel: A Life Beyond Boundaries,
by Charles F. Mann,
New World Press, $12.95, 208 pp.

Mann sketches out her involvement in Parisian church life, her staunch belief in the value of the Christian-Marxist dialogue, her support for the priest-workers, and, eventually, her role as an advisor to the French bishops at the council for matters dealing with the laity. One does not get the impression that her contributions in these areas came from any systematic program but

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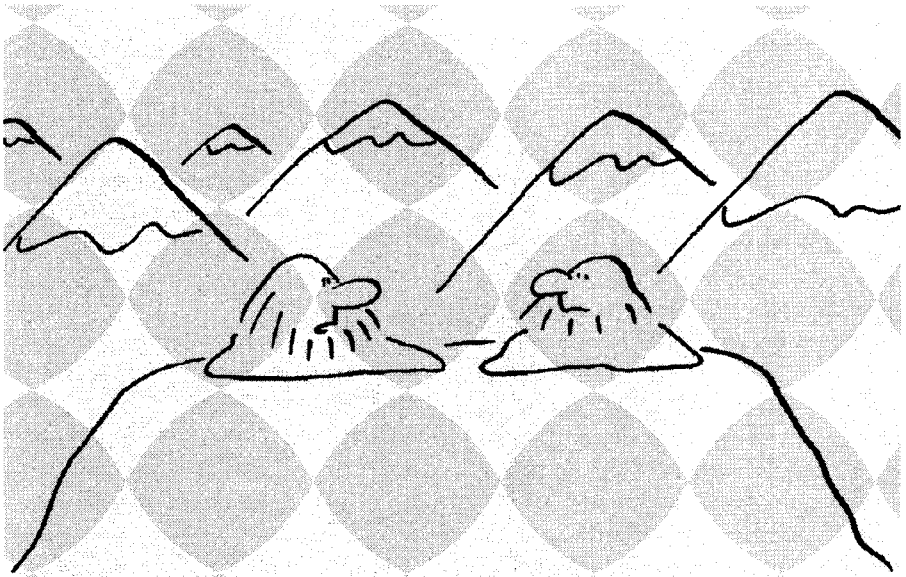

"Is there any accepted procedure for copyrighting a mantra?"

from her own profound faith and her dedication to the poor.

Unfortunately, Mann was not able to quote directly from Delbrel's work because of copyright problems, so we have only paraphrases of her spiritual writings. Her basic approach to prayer was to insist on bringing an eye of transcendent awareness to the ordinary. When asked how to pray, she spoke of the "prayer of the agenda" by which she meant loving awareness of the ordinary tasks and places one encountered. A poem on the liturgy for "those who have no Divine Office to attend" linked prayer with the everyday activities of the people she saw working and drinking in a cafe where, in fact, she composed the poem. Her marked-up Bible was studded with clippings, photos, ticket stubs, notes, etc., so that her reading would always be done in the presence of what she called "icons of humanity." Her approach to prayer, as far as I could determine from what Mann tells us, has echoes of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection's (another Parisian!) practice of the presence of God and Thérèse of Lisieux's "Little Way." However, I would like to know far more about her spiritual life than Mann tells us in this little work.

The book contains a brief bibliography of Delbrel's published works and works about her (Mann evidently wrote a dissertation on Delbrel for the Institut Catholique in the 1970s). All of the citations are in French, which means that Mann's work is the first available to us in English. One can only hope that some of Delbrel's more important spiritual writings will appear in English; perhaps an anthology, if a suitably judicious translator (and publisher!) could be found. The present book can be ordered from: New World Press/Box 640432/San Francisco, CA 94164-0432.

Our Hope for Years to Come: The Search for Spiritual Sanctuary,
by Micah Marty and Martin Marty,
Augsburg, $14.99, 112 pp.

Micah Marty carried his bellows-equipped camera from the Midwest (especially to rural churches in Nebraska) to the East Coast to capture churches which reflect the Gothic renaissance in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American church building. The result is a portfolio of forty-seven black-and-white photographs of churches and elements of those churches. Some of the pictures provide a long view (a cathedral interior) while others are close-up details of, among other things, exterior sculptures such as lintel carvings, buttresses, and so on. The pictures have a stark crispness to them with rare examples of the "impressionistic." My favorite is a straightforward shot of some pillars in Saint Thomas Church in New York City where the crispness of the picture brings out the marks of the stone carver. The bite of the chisel is a profound signature for me which explains why, for example, I have always preferred Michelangelo's *Pieta* in the Florence Cathedral to the polished youthful one we see in Saint Peter's Basilica. It is good to be reminded that statues are hewn from tough, earthly material.

To these handsome photos, Martin Marty has added a series of meditations prefaced by verses from Christian hymnody and rounded off with a suggested Bible passage. That there are forty-seven pictures and text has no mystical significance. Marty does suggest, however, that if each one were used for each day of Lent, the book would take one exactly from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday. Of course, one would not have to follow a Lenten reading program. The meditations are independent enough to be used without reading straight through. In fact, only three of them name Jesus explicitly, even though the whole tenor of the text is deeply and lovingly biblical.

What the Martys, father and son, have given us is a holistic meditation aid that engages the visual, the literary, and the musical. I found myself, while studying the pictures or scanning the text, humming some of the hymns with which I was familiar. It all seemed just right. In short: a handsome and decidedly contemplative volume. Someone would appreciate it as gift.

Flow of Flesh, Reach of Spirit: Thinksheets of a Contrarian Christian,
by Willis Elliott,
Eerdmans, $15, 252 pp.

Willis Elliott is a Protestant pastor with a Ph. D. from Chicago and was, for years, a seminary professor in New York City. For the past two decades he has been a scholar-in-residence at a retreat house on Cape Cod. Most impor-

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tant, however, Elliott has been a keen student of the Bible. He reads it daily in the original languages. For over twenty years he has also sent out, to a group of willing readers, a "thinksheet"—a few pages reflecting on current events or reflections on his Bible study or ruminations on church life. By his count, he has composed well over two thousand of these reflections. This book is a sampler. To some of the older thinksheets a "1995 Supplement" has been added.

Elliott describes himself as a "contrarian Christian." That is true in more ways than one. He is contrarian in the sense that he is unabashedly and enthusiastically a Christian and, in that sense, stands against the pretensions of contemporary secular culture. He is also a contrarian in that his opinions are stated baldly enough that almost any reader will want to take him on with a "Yes, but...." That would please him because, as Kenneth Woodward says in his introduction to the volume, this is not a "newsletter" but an ongoing conversation.

There is a lot in these "thinksheets" with which to argue. It is not clear to me that abortion and wholesale contraception are the solution to the population problem (which Elliott describes in apocalyptic language), just as it is not clear to me that Latin American liberation theology is reducible to Marxism. Others will bristle at his profound distaste for gender inclusive language in Bible translations, but still others might applaud his unsentimental critique of the relentless godlessness of public education. Is, then, Elliott a liberal? a conservative? Well, the better term is his: a "contrarian."

The forty-six chapters which make up this reader are a mixed bag (not enhanced by Elliott's penchant for diagrams which, for the most part, are puzzling), but what most attracted me to the book is the basic vehicle which he calls the "thinksheet." I very much like to see how a highly literate Christian, steeped in the Bible tradition (Elliott is no fundamentalist), can focus, in a few readable pages, on a topic and bring a fresh angle or a new approach to it. The best pages, for my money, were Elliott's reflections on how to read the Bible. In these I discovered, in a new language, what has always been important for me: reading strategies that combine a critical sense with a sapiential one.

How, then, to describe Elliott and his enterprise? Apart from a short quote from Thomas Aquinas in the epilogue, Elliott never quotes a Catholic author or comments on matters Catholic. His world is very much a Protestant one. Nonetheless, it is to the old Thomistic vocation of "handing on to others the things already contemplated" (*contemplata aliis tradere*) that I would appeal to describe what he is about. I like the way he goes about things even when I do not like all the things he says. That, however, is as it should be when reading a contrarian Christian.

Between his now classic *Soul Friend* (1977) and *Experiencing God: Theology as Spirituality* (1985), the Anglican theologian Kenneth Leech published a little book called *True Prayer* (1980). It has been out of print for some time, so it is good news that Morehouse has reissued this quite readable work in an inexpensive paperback format. Leech possesses a facility for intertwining classic works of spirituality with selections from *belles lettres* in an inviting sort of way. He is also adept at keeping prayer set within the context of the public life of the church and true to the demands of social justice. Prayer for Leech is *Christian* prayer and it is not an exercise in privatism.

True Prayer: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality,
by Kenneth Leech,
Morehouse, $12.95, 202 pp.

The author does a nice job of relating prayer to the sacramental life and the sociopolitical life of the one praying. Leech's sources are a nice ecumenical blend of Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Anglican works.

Anyone who would like a primer on Christian prayer would do well to consider this volume; it would also make a fine retreat companion. It only saddens me that Morehouse, in reissuing this work, did not see fit to have Leech (or someone) update the bibliography. There have been some very fine books on prayer published since this work first appeared. That criticism aside, I can recommend this volume for anyone interested in the practice of Christian prayer. Its reasonable price makes it all the more attractive. □

Lawrence S. Cunningham *teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame.*

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

the Fearful Symmetry which is His language in conversing with men; but history is no more than the clay in which He works. Who would look for Michelangelo's *Pietá* in the quarry where the marble to make it was procured? Or for Shakespeare's *King Lear* in history?

"If this is true of mortal genius, how much more so when the artist is God Himself, concerned to send us a self-portrait in the lineaments, and using the language of mortality in order to open up for us new vistas of hope and understanding."

Muggeridge's book is called *Jesus: The Man Who Lives.*

TOM CONNELLY
Dumont, N.J.

Author's revision

It was a surprise to open your recent education issue [April 5] and discover there an article ("Notes to a Student") I had written some time ago. Though the article accurately reflects my views at the time of writing, I would say things a bit differently now. My concern has to do with the insert focusing on the Channel ministry training program. Channel was for me a positive experience, and I believe it has much in its history to be proud of. At present, however, the program is undergoing a major restructuring, and its survival is uncertain. Any person who considers entering the program or applying for one of its open staff positions should take this into serious consideration.

TIMOTHY P. SCHILLING
Vancouver, Wash.

Values & virtue

David Carlin's "Teaching Values in Schools" [February 9] pinpoints, for public education in a society both pluralistic and democratic, an inherent dilemma regarding the transmission of values. It is also, indirectly, a very strong argument for private education.

By reason of its commitment to all constituencies, the public school must limit itself, in critical areas of values education, to *information*. Pedagogical experience, however, and the wisdom of such thinkers as Plato insist that valid and enduring education must entail *formation*. This formation the public school does essay in such areas as skills acquisition, physical training, scientific methodology, participatory citizenship, and the like. As Carlin so well demonstrates, however, the public school cannot pursue a particular formation (and its attendant behavior) in many areas of value without offense to one or another cultural constituency. And so public education finds itself reduced, in these matters, to the role of pedagogical cataloguer: Here's what the Quakers say; here's what Unitarians propose; neo-Druids believe this.

Having taught at many levels in both public and private institutions, I have thought long upon this dilemma. If the strength implicit in our national motto—*"e pluribus unum"*—resides in its pluralism, its multiplicity of customs and gifts and values, then that strength must derive, not from mere encyclopedic information regarding cultural options, but from a deep and abiding formation. It must grow out of those ingrained and cultivated habits of reflection, choice, and response that theologians call "virtue."

Ironically, by virtue of its very pluralism, the public school is restricted in its service of the pluralistic imperative! In some of the most critical areas of moral virtue and transcendent belief, the public school must limit itself to broad and inoffensive generalizations, must shy away from that formation which is at the heart of efficacious instruction.

I have witnessed numerous versions of "values clarification," some more urgent than others—and have left often dispirited and disappointed. It is not that the young and their instructors do not have noble and generous visions. It is, rather, that in the face of every moral challenge—be it discrimination, sexism, violence, economic injustice—the answers always, and exclusively, devolve upon structures, upon laws and quotas, upon distributive strategies, and not at all upon formation!

I think it was Aristotle who said that the end of government is not the good life but the good person. Well, the good person is not the product of high sentiment and noble ideals, not even of a great understanding of others: The good person is a product of a process deeply embedded in the wisdom, the trial and error, myths and manners of a culture; of a discipline reinforced in lore and practice; that is to say, in formation. Without it, all the values clarification in the world is, at best, ineffectual chatter; at worst, that pernicious kind of illusion which, in the guise of good intentions, distracts us from the great moral task of becoming godly.

JOHN J. SAVANT
San Rafael, Calif.

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NOT A GOOD BET

Bud Johnson

The parochial school I attended in Kentucky may have been the only one in the nation where kids made book in the fifth grade. Our indigenous junior achievers took bets for pennies and nickels and then led us over the fence at Churchill Downs two blocks away to see how they ran.

At recess you would hear a lot more talk about fast workouts and track conditions than about fast balls and batting averages, talk no doubt picked up at the family dinner table from parents whose livelihood depended in one way or another on the horses. In my sister's class, two grades behind me, there was a girl with celebrity status. She was like a movie star's daughter. Her father was the jockey on Donerail, a long-shot Kentucky Derby winner paying odds of 91-1. And Derby week, it was a festival.

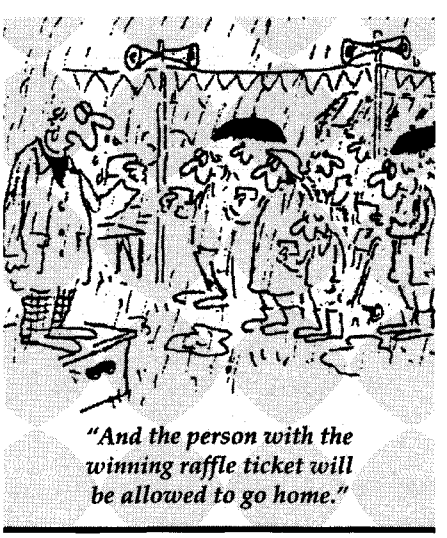
The school itself was the site of the weekly parish bingo games. The games were so well-known that streetcar motormen on their routes would announce the stop as "Bingo Junction." Off-track betting parlors, though illegal, were tolerated, sometimes leading to comic scenes reminiscent of Damon Runyon's *Guys and Dolls*. In one legendary instance, patrons in a second-floor book on Jefferson Street spotted the police approaching for a ritual bust. When the law arrived, however, no betting apparatus was to be found. There was merely a group of pious souls listening to a program called "Hymns of Faith."

In view of all this, you can't say that I emerged from a puritanical background, or that I was taught gambling is the fast lane to perdition. Even now, I don't think that all gambling is evil. But increasingly, I find myself turned off by the all-pervasive spread of commercialized gambling.

Why was it that on my first arrival in Las Vegas at some postmidnight hour (I can't tell you the exact hour; the Time of Day Service is an unlisted number in Las Vegas), I looked at shadowy figures in the hotel casino endlessly pulling levers, dealing cards, rolling dice, and thought it could well have been one of the circles of the damned in Dante's *Inferno*?

Why do I find TV spots suggesting that I celebrate the Christmas season with a visit to a nearby Indian casino or ads touting the state lottery more distasteful than commercials for hemorrhoid relief or remedies for acid indigestion? And why is it that in my heart of hearts I applaud when I hear of another river boat gambling referendum going down to defeat, or boo when I read that another city has voted to open a gambling casino?

Why is it that I thought of Calvin Coolidge the other day when I heard on TV that legalized gambling is now a $300-billion-a-year industry in the United States? Silent Cal's pronouncement that "the business of America is business" has become "the business of America is gambling." (Come to think of it, $300 billion could go a long way toward balancing the budget without taking food out of the mouths of babes.)



"And the person with the winning raffle ticket will be allowed to go home."

And therein, I think, lies my revulsion. The gambling I grew up with was mom and pop stuff. Sure, it wasn't all innocence. In one of James T. Farrell's Studs Lonigan novels, set in the 1930s, there is a sad episode in which a housewife turns to prostitution to replenish the grocery money she lost betting on the horses. And no doubt there were payoffs, too; you can't have illegal enterprises without some degree of corruption.

But even with the evils it wasn't the large-scale hyperactivity we find today. The little old ladies playing bingo at the commercial bingo parlor may well be the daughters of the little old ladies who played bingo at my school. But then there were not so many, and there was no big-time advertising to pull them in.

When I was in school, the only game at the drug store across the street was a penny pin ball machine. Now drug stores across the nation hawk state lottery tickets enticing people who can ill afford it to throw away money better used elsewhere. While it is heartwarming to see a janitor on the TV news receive a $5-million check from the state lottery, in all fairness equal play should be given to the bankruptcies and suicides of people who just couldn't quit. The jackpot is always in big print; the real odds are in print so fine it is unreadable or voiced at the speed of gibberish.

Unfortunately, so long as state politicians look on legalized gambling as a painless way to raise revenue, the wheel of misfortune will continue to spin. But as every taxpayer knows, even with an annual take of $44 billion, state-operated gambling is never enough to pay the bills. One wonders what's next: state-sponsored drug dealers? □

Bud Johnson *was for many years a special assistant to the mayor of Milwaukee.*

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and next. The endowment fund has gotten off to a promising start,
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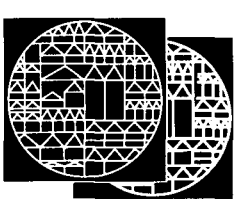

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